CROSSINGS

WALTER DE LA MARE

ILLUSTRATED BY

DOROTHY P. LATHROP

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CROSSINGS

A FAIRY PLAY

Books by

WALTER DE LA MARE

THE THREE MULLA MULGARS

MEMOIRS OF A MIDGET

COME HITHER

THE RETURN

THE RIDDLE

CROSSINGS

D. P. Lathrop

CROSSINGS: A FAIRY PLAY *by* WALTER DE LA MARE

With music by C. ARMSTRONG GIBBS

Illustrations by DOROTHY P. LATHROP

New York ALFRED · A · KNOPF *MCMXXIII*

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The People of the Play

Mr. Charles James Wildersham, *the Father of*
Sarah, *or* Sallie,
Frances, *or* France,
Anthony, *or* Tony, *and*
Ann.
Miss Agatha Wildersham, *his sister and their Aunt, of Bayswater.*
Rev. Jeremy Welcome, *a friend of the children's Aunt Susan, who is dead.*
Miss Julia Welcome, *his sister.*
Josephine, *their niece.*
Lady Minch, *of the Hall, Great Crossings.*
Mrs. Marshall, *the cook (no longer of Bayswater).*
Mr. Josiah Widge, *the Cabman.*
Pollie, *his mare.*
Mr. Budge, *the Butcher of Little Crossings.*
Mrs. Budge, *his good wife.*
Jemima Budge, *his small daughter.*
Mr. Honeyman, *the Baker of Little Crossings.*
Mrs. Honeyman, *his good wife.*
Emily Honeyman, *his small daughter.*
The Candlestick-maker, *of Nowhere.*
Three Beggarmen, *of Everywhere.*
The Ghost, *of Somewhere.*
Jagga, *dog one.*
Jugga, *dog two.*
The Queen of the Fairies,
and
Fairies Numberless and Innumerable from All Regions of the World.

The Scenery of the Play

ACT ONE. The Drawing-Room, Bayswater.
5 P.M., December 7th.

ACT TWO. The Parlour, Crossings.
10:30 P.M., December 10th.

ACT THREE. The Kitchen, Crossings.
11 A.M., December 21st.

ACT FOUR. The Garden, Crossings.
4 P.M., December 23rd.

ACT FIVE. The Parlour, Crossings.
Christmas Eve.

Act One

The Beginning

Act One: The Beginning

Aunt Agatha and Bayswater

Time: A foggy Saturday afternoon, the Seventh of December. Scene: A large forbidding drawing-room, with a small fire in it, in Bayswater. On the left is a lofty draped window casting a dun, stagnant light into the room. High doors in blue and cream are to the right and between the window and the marble chimney-piece.

[*On a stool in front of the vast brass fender squats Ann, a child of seven, with all her dolls. Her hair is parted in the middle, and severely plaited on either side of her smooth round cheeks. It is of the rarest, fairest tinge of gold. Her Aunt Agatha has designed her clothes. She peeps out of her body as if out of a cupboard.*

Sallie, a slim dark girl of 17 or 18, with a dark mobile face, is seated before a black piano as the curtain slowly rises. She speaks in a low clear voice, as if out of her thoughts. Her hair is drawn back tightly from her forehead. Her Aunt Agatha has designed her clothes.]

Ann [*to her dolls*].

Now you must be as quickerly quiet as a mouse, Oddsboddikins. Sarah, you mustn't whoop, please. Sallie's going to sing you to sleep. [*She rocks her favourite and ugliest doll, Sarah, to her breast.*]

[*Sallie in faintly tragic mockery sings:*

"Break, break, break
On thy cold grey stones, oh sea!"

then twists the accompaniment off into the first four bars of "Sallie in Our Alley." She stoops over the keys. Silence. Without, the Lamplighter lights the lamp.]

Sallie.

What shall I sing, Mummikins? The fog's in my throat.

Ann.

Sometimes, Sallie, you sing such 'stremely sad songs, they make Oddsboddikins cry, they do. Cough the old frog out.

[*Sallie sings.*]

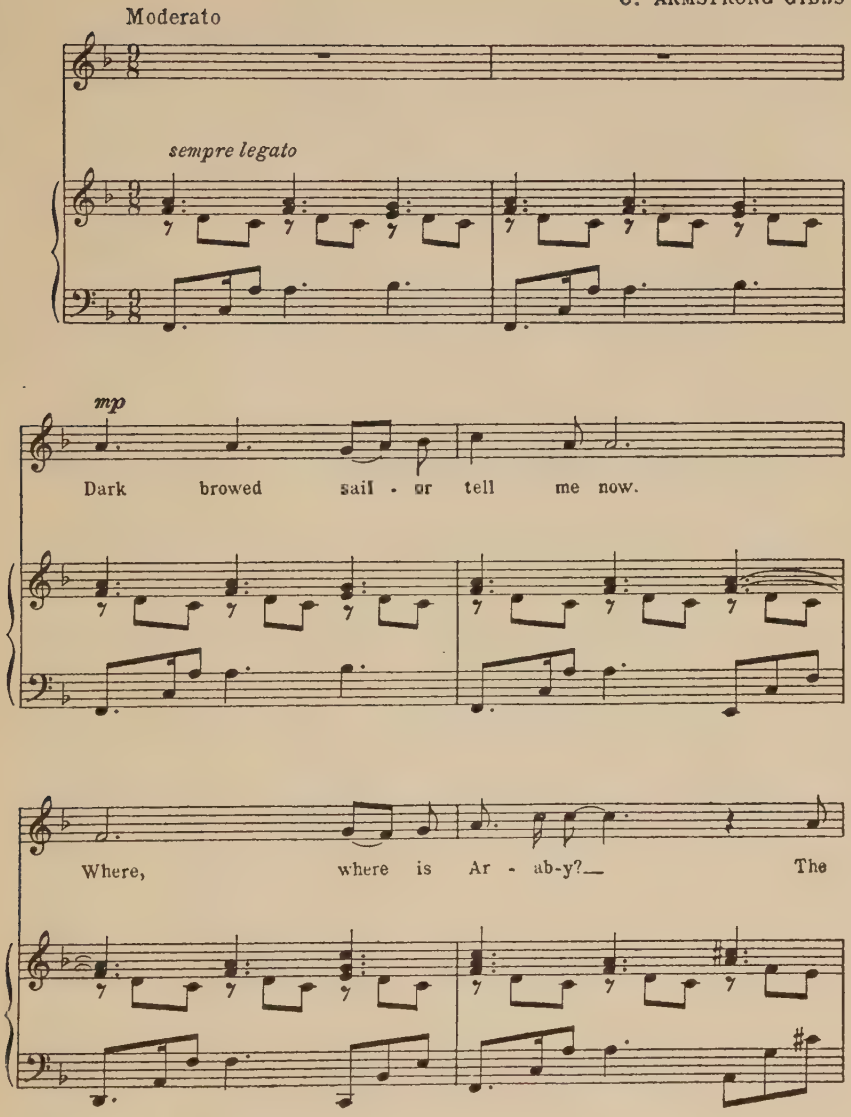
"Dark-browed Sailor, tell me now,
Where, where is Araby?
The tide's aflow, the wind ablow,
'Tis I who pine for Araby."

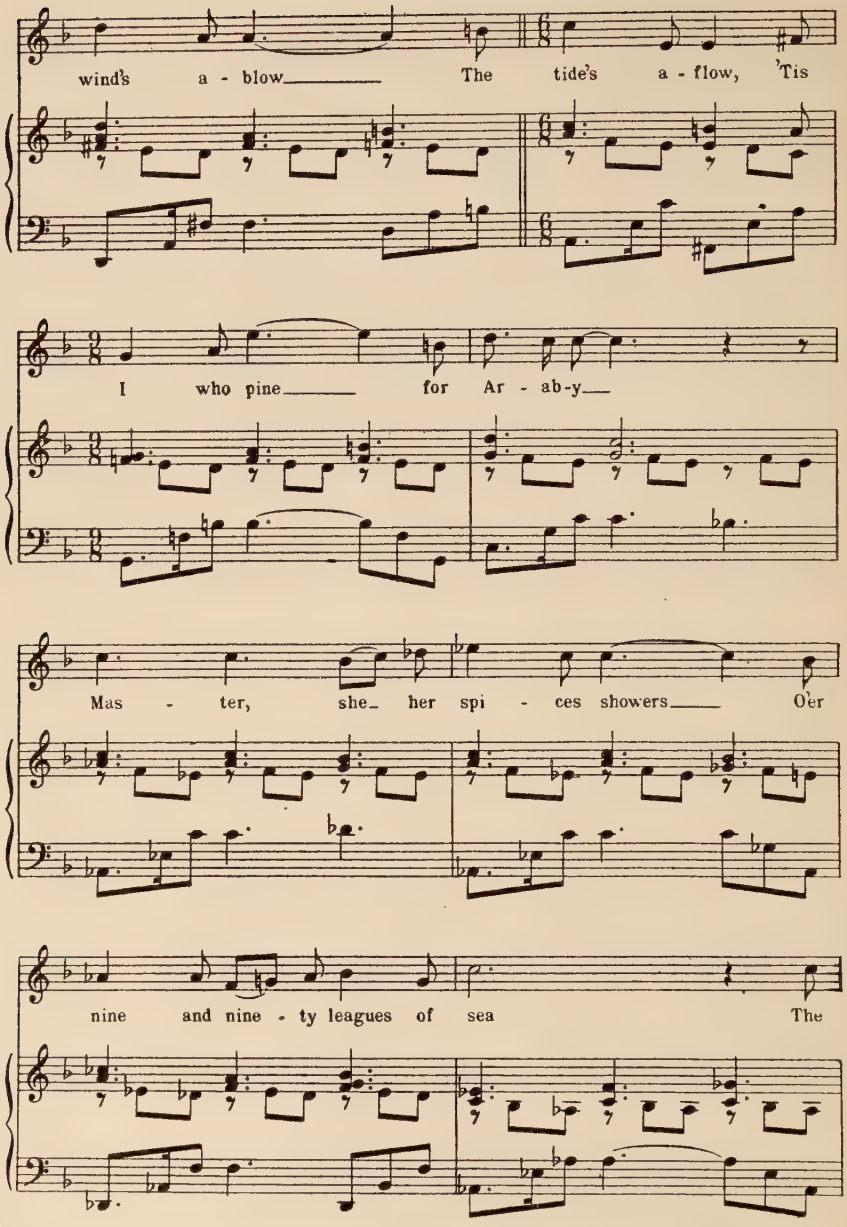
"Master, she her spices showers
O'er nine and ninety leagues of sea;
The laden air breathes faint and rare—
Dreams on far distant Araby."

"Araby"

(Sallie)

C. ARMSTRONG GIBBS

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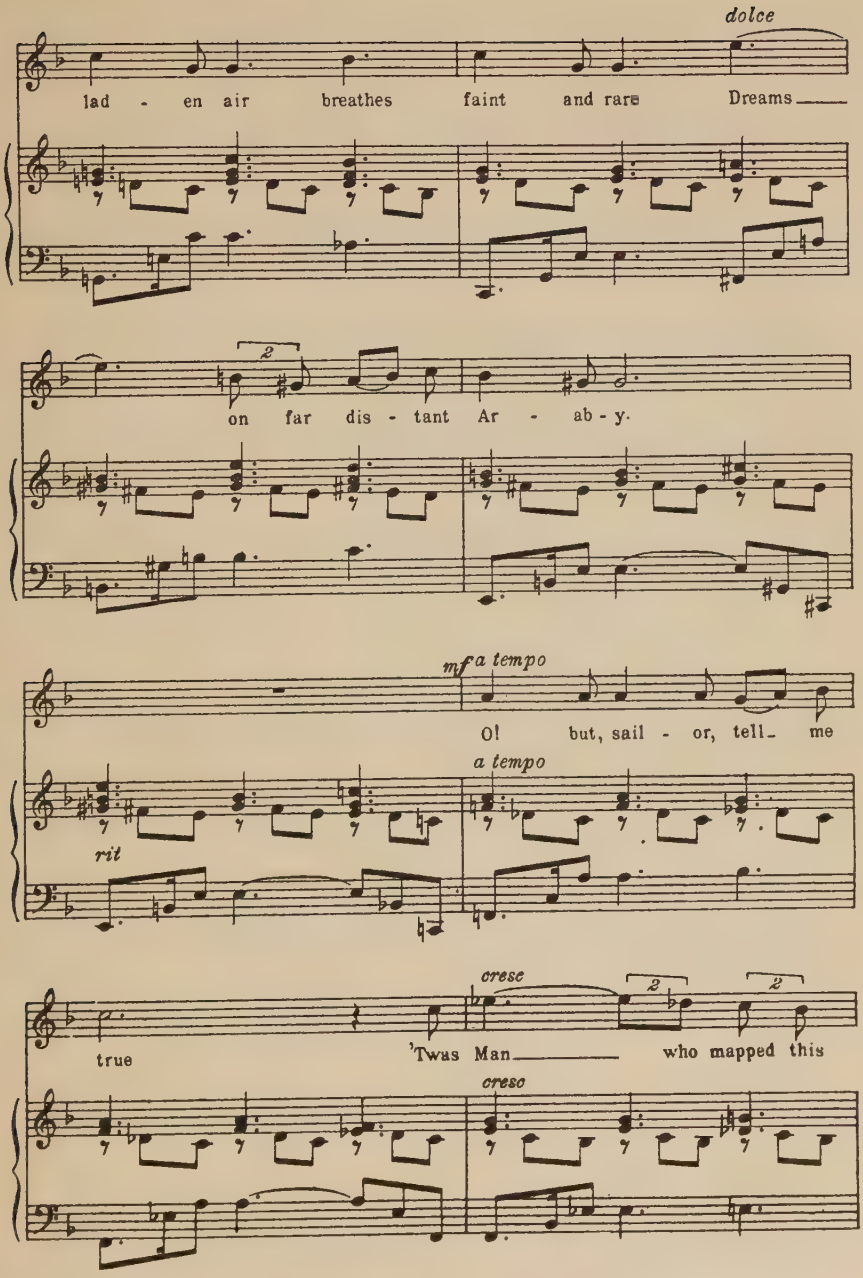
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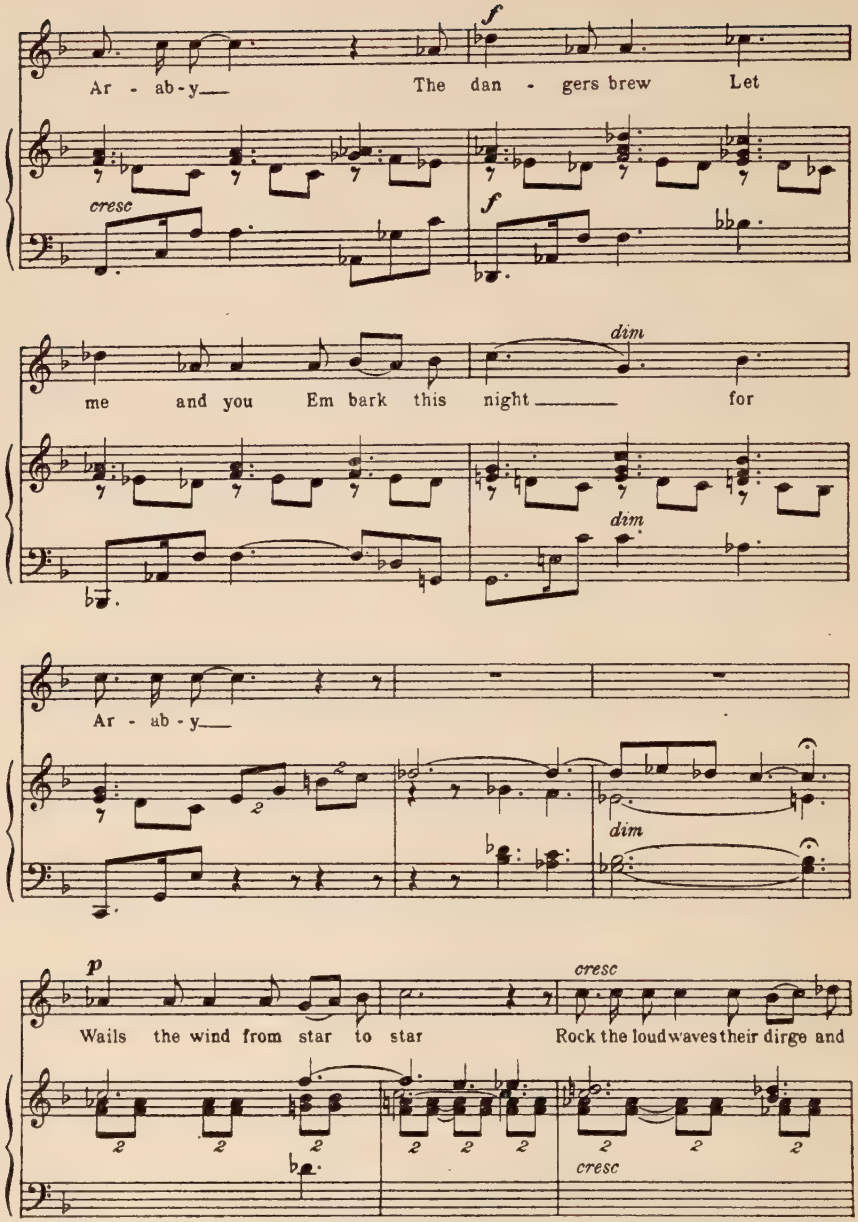
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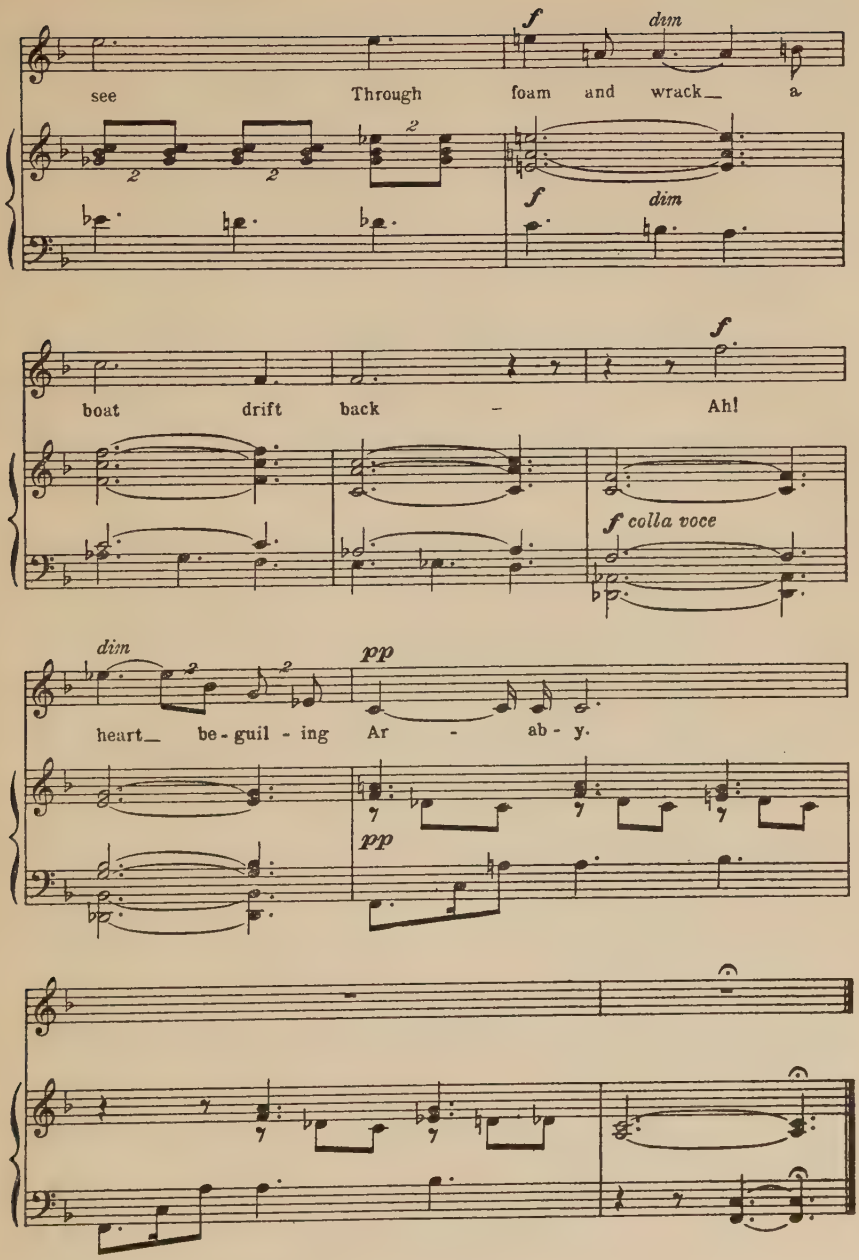
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"Oh, but Sailor, tell me true;
'Twas Man who mapped this Araby;
Though dangers brew, let me and you
Embark this night for Araby. . . ."

Wails the wind from star to star;
Rock the loud waves their dirge: and, see!
Through foam and wrack, a boat drift back:
Ah, heart-beguiling Araby!

[*Towards the conclusion of the song, appears in the doorway on the left, and, chin on bosom, stands listening in rapt solemnity to Sallie's strains, Mrs. Marshall, the family's cook. She is of the shape of a tub, with a little bonnet on her head, and carries an immense brown-paper parcel, a pelican-handled umbrella, a bulging handbag, etc. The music ceases. The fog darkens.*]

Mrs. Marshall [*pensively wagging her head*].

Music have charms, Miss Sallie, but a mournful loorigoobrious song for your young years, with them harebrained young fellers gone and drownded in an empty boat, though not as I ever much envied my pore sister at Southend, shrimps, niggers and alls. I've come, Miss Sallie, to take my departure and your aunt not at home as wasn't to be expected to shake the dust off my feet, and the silver counted three times and not a neggspoon missing.

Sallie.

Oh, Mrs. Marshall, don't say such things. I simply can't believe it. What *shall* we do without you!

Mrs. Marshall.

Why there, Miss Sallie, parting's parting; and you can't drag nobody back even in a land of so-called Christians once they're gone, which isn't what I'm hoping to do yet awhile, never hav-

ing been a rolling stone nor set much store by moss. What I'm saying is, Lor' forbid I should complain. Light work I never found, two kept or twenty, and me a scullery-maid in a nobleman's famblely when I was scarcely out of my cradle. Fifteen years, and your pore mother and all, I've seen you agrowind up like grains of mustard-seed and—but there! it's not for me to be throwing stones in glarst houses. I'm going to my daughter's, Miss Sallie, my Rosie's, to a HOME: which in Bayswater cannot be found, referring only, in a manner of speaking, to No. 8.

Sallie.

Yes, yes, Mrs. Marshall. I know; I know.

Mrs. Marshall.

Not that I'm working about in my words to deny that your aunt *means* well, Miss Sallie—though I never knew nobody what meant well worse. But that's our hevingly courses, miss, and neither here nor there. [*With a prolonged shake of her large little-bonneted head, she waddles over to Ann.*] Good-bye and God's precious be with you, you pore small innocent bundle of motherless love and your babbies and all. [*She hugs Ann to her capacious bosom.*]

Ann.

Good-bye, darlint darlint Cook, I loves you, I do.

Mrs. Marshall.

Bless your sweet blue hevingly eyes, and maybe you'll come and have a bit of dripping toast to your tea with your old Mrs. Marshall when your pore pa's his own man again. [*To Sallie.*] There, Miss Sallie, you're looking peaked and wan in your pretty cheeks and nobody that can be called a man to watch the roses fade. But the proof of the pudding's in the eating, and may the Lord be a comfort to you all.

[*She is going out when Frances, a tall, straight, reddish, boyish girl of about 15, in a large check coat, strides in, carrying a parcel.*]

Frances.

Cooksicums! Faithless, perjured Cooksicums! Only just in time! Unkind, unnatural Creature; you were actually going without saying good-bye to me; and here I've been lavishing *all* my fortune on you. [*She rapidly exposes the contents of her parcel.*] Yes! Slippers! Bedroom Slippers!

Mrs. Marshall.

Oh miss!

Frances.

The very largest in stock, the man said, *roomy!* And made especially in two layers for private wear in bed. Take them, ungrateful thing, before I dissolve into tears.

Mrs. Marshall.

Oh, but Miss Frances; you shouldn't, you shouldn't, Miss Frances; I couldn't, I couldn't, Miss Frances. . . .

Frances.

But you must, and you must. I insist. I'll be hurt, I'll howl, I'll tear my hair, I'll jump up the chimley. I'll give them to Aunt Agatha!

Mrs. Marshall.

Oh but reely, Miss Frances. You shouldn't, I couldn't; you shouldn't, I couldn't. . . .

[*They go out wrestling and disputing; their voices die away.*]

Ann [*ponderingly*].

We hasn't *any* friends now, has we, Sallie?

Ann
Sarah
Elspeth
Oddsboddikins
Samuel
D.P.L.

Sallie.

My *dear* . . .

[*She goes over to the fire and kneels down beside Ann. Frances returns, ruffled but triumphant.*]

Frances.

It's a shame, Sallie, a wicked poisonous shame. She was positively crying; her tears are all salt down my back. To think of it: Emma gone! Cook gone! [*She seizes the poker and plunges it into the fire.*] A Pig; a perfect incomparable Pig!

Sallie [*glancing nervously at the door*].

Ssh, Frances. Think what you are saying! She may be in at any moment; and you know we are not allowed to poke the fire.

Ann [*sagely staring*].

If you pokes *that* fire, France, it'll go out, it will.

Sallie.

France, dear; we must just try, *try*—and be patient.

Frances.

Patient! Aunt Agatha! It's sheer tyranny. Sheer, black, mediæval-æval tyranny. Look at the guys she makes of us. I *won't* be a slave. What right has she to practise her silly old theories on us? [*In an icy superior voice.*] "Education, Frances, means to lead out." So it does—on a chain. [*Darkly.*] Some day she shall see even if I can't bark I can bite!

Sallie.

But France, dear, what is the use——

Frances.

We do nothing; we see nobody; we never so much as poke

our noses out into the world; we are just bits of dumb, ugly old furniture—like *you,* old Four-Legs! [*She leans forward, whispering hotly.*] Last night, Sallie, I lay awake, *thinking,* and I made up my mind, I just made—up—my—mind that sooner than grow up Aunt Agatha's way I'd cut off this wretched old pigtail, jump out of the window, and run away to sea. I want to *see* things. I want to *do* things. I want to go all round this oblate old spheroid and up the other side. I can't *breathe* in this cage!

Ann [*solemnly*].

If you went and jumped out of the window, France, you'd break your *leg.* When the Dawson's housemaid fell out of the window she did break *all* her legs.

Sallie.

You know, Frances dearest, it's useless to grumble. I agree there isn't much—much Romance. I might be still in the nursery for all I can see. And now even Mrs. Marshall's gone. But there [*she dabs her handkerchief at her nose*], "no cwoss, no cwown," France.

Ann [*cheerfully to her Sarah*].

No cwoss, *no* cwown, Sarwah.

Sallie.

What's more, my dear—but you mustn't breathe a single word: life *may* be going to be an adventure, after all. Father's been talking to me. He is most dreadfully worried about money matters. He doesn't think we can possibly stay on here. And, and *now*—a *letter's* come. [*She glances over her shoulder, listens a moment, then whispers.*] We *may* be going away.

Frances.

Sallie! Going away? Where? When? How?

Sallie.

Into the country: to a house in the country.

Frances [*leaps to her feet*].

A house in the country! Sarah, my Sal! O Marble Halls! O Bayswater! Beloved aunt! Farewell!

Ann.

Will there be paddling, Sallie?

Sallie.

Not paddling, Mummikins; but woods and fields and haystacks and cows and geese and rooks. Moo-moo; gobble-gobble; caw-caw! And Christmas, Nann! Holly and mistletoe, and icicles and real white country snow! [*To Frances.*] Of course, nothing can be settled until Aunt Agatha agrees. And it's not *quite* certain whether she won't come with us.

Frances [*louringly*].

She *shan't,* Sallie. Poppy and mandragora and all the derrowsy syrups. . . . But where, you black-locked Angel, where?

Sallie.

It's Aunt Susan's house, Crossings—where mother was a little girl. Poor Aunt Susan died a few weeks ago, you know, and I *think* the house has been left to father in her Will. I see it, Frances; it all comes darkly stealing in. . . .

Frances [*solemnly*].

But, my dear, this is what's called in books Eureka. This is Bliss. No more Prep! No more Algebra! No more scales in that musty-fusty, old practice-room! No more "When I was your age." This loathsome den! O Sallie, Sallie, it can't be true! [*To hide her emotion she buries her face in her skirts and breaks into an extravagant keening.*]

[*Tony appears, a schoolboy about 14. He has forgotten*

to take off his too-capacious top hat, and is carrying a battered portmanteau.]

Tony.

My child; these tears! *What* can't be true? She's not [*he points a solemn kid-gloved finger towards the zenith*] "a better place"?

Sallie [*horror-stricken*].

Tony! Tony! You've run away!

Tony [*imitating his aunt*].

Alas, my poor Sarah, no! Merely mumps.

Sallie and Frances.

Mumps.

Ann.

What's mumps, Tony, please?

Tony.

What ho, sister Ann! *You're* glad to see your poor old half-starved Tony, ain't you? [*Hands in pockets, he broods over the fire. The others join him and they presently sit in a row, their backs turned on the world at large. Tony continues sententiously.*] All the other fellers—dancing their eyes out. Billie Bones made a rag up about it. [*He chants dolorously.*]

When bread's of sawdust,
And suet's in lumps,
And every man Jack of you's
Down in the dumps:
Then, heh, for chickenpox!
Hi, for whooping cough!
Ho, for measles and mumps!

Not much fun coming home—here, Sisters mine. Where is she? Marooned in the fog? You can't see a cab-horse out-

side until you are stunned by his nosebag. And Sallie!—has my—has a letter come?

Ann [*solemnly*].

We're goin' away, Tony. Crossings, Tony! Moo-moo! Gobble-gobble! Caw-caw!

[*Sallie and Frances nod violently.*]

Tony [*incredulously*].

H'm! Gobble-gobble—I know: "good for geese."

[*Sallie and Frances nod more violently.*]

Tony.

Well, "going away"—what of it, you chuckle-headed mandarins—if *she's* coming?

Sallie [*hastily*].

It's not really quite, quite settled yet, Tony. But you mustn't breathe even a single syllable. But I feel in my bones it will be something, well, *different*. There's no doubt we are a *very* bad and stupid family; but I do think it can't be good for one never to be allowed to do a single wicked thing for a—for a decent *reason*. It makes life a kind of trap. Father's in it too, you know, poor dear. But so is Aunt Agatha for that matter. Just Cages.

Tony.

Cages! Even a miserable canary has a lump of sugar now and then.

Ann.

Cook told Emma that sometimes men put little birds' *eyes* out to make them sing. That's cruel, that is.

[*They crouch in a desolate huddle over the sinking fire—Silence.*]

[*Enter, soundlessly, Miss Wildersham. She is the portrait of which the Bayswater drawing-room is the frame. Followed by Mr. Wildersham, she surveys the scene.*]

Miss Wildersham.

Most refreshing! A really happy family! What was I saying, Charles? How poor Susan would have enjoyed the picture!

[*The children start up simultaneously, and stand in a dumb glum row facing her.*]

Miss Wildersham.

I am loth to disturb you, children. But I must remind *you,* Sarah, that it's five minutes past six, and that Ann is not in bed. I must remind *you,* Frances, that your face is the colour of a Red Indian's, and that you are not doing your Preparatory Work. And I must remind *you,* Ann, that only *one* doll is allowed at *one* time in the drawing-room. Apparently some one has been disturbing the fire.

[*Frances vanishes. Tony fumbles for his portmanteau, and begins to edge furtively towards the door.*]

Sallie [*with a deep sigh*].

Yes, Aunt Agatha.

[*Ann, having made a wild clutch at her dolls, is led off. She breaks into a steady, dismal yell.*]

Ann.

Oh Sallie; Samivel! Samivel! You know he's got whoopin'-corf.

[*Mr. Wildersham sinks, with a groan, into an armchair. Tony's fist has closed upon the door handle. His aunt sweeps round upon him.*]

Miss Wildersham.

And pray, Anthony, what brings *you* home?—with your hat and your portmanteau.

Tony [*sullenly*].

Mumps.

Miss Wildersham.

Oh! Mumps this time, is it?

Tony [*in a deep voice*].

Mumps!

Miss Wildersham.

I sincerely trust, Anthony, it is not [*imitating him*] "Mumps" which prevents you from pronouncing your aunt's name. Cough, boy, or blow your nose. You were going to speak to Anthony about his report, were you not, Charles?

[*Mr. Wildersham wearily passes the report to his sister, and sits with fingers together, gloomily gazing into the fire. She adjusts her lorgnette, studies and silently reads the report, with an occasional ominous glance at Anthony.*]

Miss Wildersham [*suddenly glaring up at him with a fixed smile*].

On second thoughts, Anthony, it would seemingly be advisable to discuss this remarkable document to-morrow morning at an early breakfast. Your sisters might profit by it; and it will be something for us to look forward to. [*Sardonically pointing to hat and portmanteau.*] And now remove these baubles. You will find bread and margarine in the kitchen and excellent cold water in the tap. No doubt you are exhausted after the term's exertions and would like to go to bed.

[*Tony goes out. He is heard in the distance forlornly whistling "Britons never, never shall be slaves."*]

Mr. Wildersham [*poking the fire*].

I cannot understand, Agatha, why this room always strikes cold.

Miss Wildersham.

For my part, Charles, it is not the room that strikes cold—young people do not require artificial warmth—it is this crazy legacy of Susan's. We have just surprised our *fauna* in its

wilds. I ask you, Charles, are they the kind of creature on which to make such a demented experiment?

Mr. Wildersham.

In common fairness, Agatha, you cannot visit Susan's eccentricities on me. She, too, had theories about the bringing up of children. So have you. She did not think that mine—ours—had enough freedom, enough life and responsibility. Her argument was that human beings of any age who are not happy cannot be wise. By her will she leaves Crossings to me in trust for Sallie and the others on two conditions. First, that, as I have explained, they spend a complete fortnight alone there; and next, that at the end of it they themselves confess that they have been happier and have proved themselves to be wiser than they were when they left your charge. Susan seems to have entertained a touching belief in the School of Experience—however high the fees may be.

Miss Wildersham.

School of fiddlesticks. Pray, Charles, are children *intended* to be happy? Is any one who tries to do his *duty* happy? Am *I* happy? Has my sex won its rights and liberties merely to be *happy?* And who, may I ask, is to judge whether they are *wiser?* Are *they?*

Mr. Wildersham.

No, that is to be the ordeal of the Vicar of Little Crossings, Mr. Jeremy Welcome.

Miss Wildersham.

H'm: Mr. Jeremy Welcome! What will happen? Mark my words, Charles. The children will simply run wild. They will over-eat, over-sleep, over-dress, and do *no* lessons. Sarah will run up ruinous bills with the tradespeople. Her good heart, as you call it, will welcome every beggar and footpad that comes whining to the door. Frances will read trashy novels. An-

Frances
D.P.L.

thony will be out at all hours of the day and night. He will smoke, burn, and burrow. Crossings will become a byword for miles around. As for Ann—she'll be kidnapped, or stray off into the woods and be lost. That's my prediction—I see nothing but evil wherever I look.

Mr. Wildersham [*pacing up and down*].

I'm sorry, Agatha. It is not exactly a *cheerful* view. I am immensely grateful to you. You have—er—mothered the motherless. But—well—think of my position. Servants gone, income going, this house impossible. *However* crazy the scheme, I have no choice. To refuse would be neither fair nor prudent. Besides, I confess I am a little curious. I am anxious to see what the children will make of their opportunity. Let me be candid. I am restless; ill at ease. Susan's letter has brought the old times back to me—Crossings. [*He casts his eyes towards the ceiling.*] I begin to—to *doubt* this house —these draperies, these angles, this appalling hush.

Miss Wildersham.

Draperies, angles, hush? What are you saying, Charles?

Mr. Wildersham.

There is a gloom; a demoniac gloom.

Miss Wildersham.

A what gloom?

Mr. Wildersham.

I said demoniac. I blame nobody. I blame—— [*He starts forward.*] Can't you see? Can't you feel it? We are being haunted.

Miss Wildersham.

I implore you, Charles. Control yourself! This isn't *seemly.*

[*A protracted pause. Mr. Wildersham gloats out of the window into the fog.*]

Miss Wildersham.

Enough of this fatuity. I am to understand that the children are to know nothing of this insane proposal? They are simply to be flung to the wolves. That, I understand, is another of our poor Susan's conditions.

Mr. Wildersham.

Exactly. They are to go to Crossings alone, and to fend entirely for themselves. [*He flings a cushion from one chair to another.*] Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

Miss Wildersham [*icily*].

The shibboleth, I believe, of such French *moralists* as Rousseau and Robespierre. . . . I wish you well of Susan. She has passed over, and my lips, unfortunately, are sealed. You have told Sallie?

Mr. Wildersham.

So far, but I must explain further. [*He rings the bell; rings again; then calls out of the door on the left.*] Sallie!

[*Sallie enters, her shoulders draped in an immense fringed funereal shawl.*]

Sallie.

Yes, Aunt Agatha?

Miss Wildersham.

And why, my dear Sarah, this charming array?

Sallie [*in a low voice*].

It's so cold in my room my fingers wouldn't hold the needle, Aunt Agatha. Besides, Ann is very restless, so I was going to bed.

Miss Wildersham.

And where is your dressing-gown?

Sallie.

Tony's feet were so cold, I . . . I . . .

Mr. Wildersham.

The fact is, Sallie, I have decided that you and the children all start off for Crossings on Tuesday.

Sallie [*shuts her eyes to conceal her rapture*].

Yes, father.

Mr. Wildersham.

Your Aunt—or Mrs. Dobbie—er—may or may not come with you, or be there when you arrive. If neither comes, you will have to carry on by yourselves for a while. . . . Does the prospect alarm you, my dear?

Sallie [*looks at her Aunt and wriggles a little closer into her shawl*].

No, father.

Miss Wildersham.

You won't miss us, Sarah—not much?

Sallie.

"Miss you," Aunt Agatha? I shall, indeed! And oh, Daddie [*she kneels down beside his chair and hides her face on his knee*], how I shall miss *you!* And I do pray things will come right. I am holding my thumbs for you—tight.

Miss Wildersham.

Please, Sarah, we are not acting a charade. Why, what's this?

[*Ann enters from the left in her nightgown, hugging her large, ugly doll.*]

Sallie.

Oh! Oh! Be careful, Aunt Agatha! She is walking in her sleep.

[*Lost in dream, her eyes wide open, her right hand lifted*

a little into the air, Ann comes to her Aunt, gropes over her dress, touches her cheek. Miss Wildersham starts back with a peculiar cry of apprehension. Ann wakes; stands staring.]

Ann.

Oh! [*She turns away in dread and runs to Sallie.*] Sallie! Sallie! I dreamed it was a fairy!

[*A dead silence falls. The gas-flame of the street lamp begins to leap and dip, casting unpleasing shadows into the gaunt room. Mr. Wildersham puts up his eye-glass.*]

Mr. Wildersham.

'Pon my word, Agatha; I don't like the—the *feel* of all this. To use your own word, it isn't seemly; unreal, as if—as if arranged—you know, like the beginning of some sentimental childish play. And yet, God knows, this is a devil-fearing household.

Miss Wildersham [*motionless*].

"God," Charles! "Devil," Charles! Do you realise who is drinking it all in?

[*After a last desperate gasp, the flame of the street lamp expires.*]

CURTAIN

Act Two

The Ghost and the Fairy Wine

Act Two

The Ghost and the Fairy Wine

Time: Roundabout 10 o'clock at night on the Tenth of December. Scene: In the vague looming light of starshine and hoarfrost, the dark low-ceiled parlour of Crossings. Beyond its wide bow-shaped windows lies outspread the gently sloping lawn of a wintry garden, skirted by woods of hazel, holly, and thorn. A young moon that has been in the heavens is set, and the winter constellations tremble there like fireflies.

On the left of the room is an open hearth, with a roomy ingle-nook and Sphinx-headed fire-dogs; and beyond the hearth is a casement window—a "peeping" window. A dial clock stands silent on the chimney-piece, flanked by two old candlesticks, and surmounted by a Queen Anne

mirror, its quicksilver dimmed and foxed with age. On the nearer side of the hearth is a low round-headed door, its twin door being to the left of a Chippendale bureau, which stands against the right wall and faces the hearth. On this side of the bureau is a spinet.

[*Against the darkness of the curtains, motionlessly gazing out into the night, is what would clearly appear to be the ghost of a gentle little old woman, attired in a black silk flounced dress and a cap. Firm-lipped, round-browed, keen-eyed, she is the portrait of which this parlour at Crossings is the frame. She may once have been Miss Susan Wildersham.*]

[*A thin wind-like music stirs in the woods. It dies off into nothingness when the muffled clanking of a distant bell resounds through the house, followed after an interval by a more prolonged and violent peal. A pause. Then, beyond the windows, a decrepit four-wheeled cab, drawn by an old knock-kneed white mare, is seen to crawl into sight and come to a standstill in the hoarfrost. Tony, in his silk hat and muffled up to the eyes, scrambles down from the box beside the cabman. He peers in at the windows. They are locked. The voices of the children are heard gabbling together in the cab. Tony disappears, and presently the little "peeping" window is thrust open. He is seen straddling its sill. He lights a match.*]

Tony.

Ahoy! Ahoy! Anybody here? [*The ghost vanishes.*] All serene, Sallie. Not a squeak, not a whisper. I'll climb in and open the door. [*Whistling to give himself confidence, he clambers in through the casement and opens the windows.*]

[*Sallie, Frances, and Ann, their shapes hunched up like Arctic explorers, descend from out the cab and come in.*

Tony

D.P.L.

Clustered together, they stand mute, gazing as if spell-bound about them.]

Frances.

How ghostly! How ghostly, Sallie!

Sallie [*to herself*].

A dream. . . . Always.

Tony.

Ahoy! Ahoy! Anybody here?

Sallie.

Oh, Tony, hush! The echo! Besides, we don't know for certain; Aunt Agatha may be—be somewhere, you know. The train was hours and hours—hours late. [*To herself.*] It *couldn't* have come too slowly. . . . Utterly still! As if one had been lost—and found. Look, Frances, it is as if the frostlight, why, *floated* in the air. And oh! a spinet like Mrs. Somerset's; what I've been longing for, for ages and ages.

[*She runs her fingers over the tinkling wiry keys and as if in echo the wood-music wells faintly into the room. Frances stealthily pushes ajar the further door.*]

Frances [*to herself*].

Dark enough, there. Sallie, I tell you what. Nobody would know it who wasn't here—it isn't *true.*

Ann.

Please, Sallie, will you pull down this horrid shawl from my mouf? I can't be seeing *nothing;* and my breath's wetted the wool.

[*Ann slowly revolves as Sallie unwinds her grey scarf and shawl, revealing the child at last in her Bayswater livery. Tony meanwhile tiptoes about in his heavy boots, lighting candles. He crouches, match in hand, over the hearth.*]

Sallie.

Tony, a fire! In the dead of night. What *would* Aunt Agatha say?

Ann.

I like this place, I do. This is the house where Ann was borned.

[*The others bow themselves down in laughter, their hands over their mouths.*]

Frances.

I'm just as hungry as a wolf. If I don't get something to eat this very minute, I shall expire into a corpse. How perfectly lovely the flames make everything—as if a hundred thousand million eyes were twinkling at us. Come along, Tony. Courage, mon enfant. Let's explore.

All.

Oh! . . .

[*Mr. Widge, the prehistoric cabman of Little Crossings, has suddenly deposited a huge trunk on the floor. In a seven-caped ulster he stands, like Ararat, awaiting his fare.*]

Sallie.

Oh, Mr. Cabman, is that you? I *am* pleased to see you again. [*She searches feverishly in her pockets and little handbag.*] Do you know, I *think,* Mr. Cabman—a most curious thing. I think I must have packed my purse in the trunk. There's nothing like keeping things safe, is there, even when you *are* absent-minded? *Please* sit down. You must be positively frozen up there in the cold.

Mr. Widge [*sardonically*].

Frozen, miss? Not Mr. Widge, miss; too thick through. . . . The last time we come along here, we were taking some-

body *out,* we were. . . . What butter wouldn't melt in the poor leddy's mouth? . . . God bless 'ee; leaves nobody, *they* don't. [*A spectral wail of music drifts in on the air. The old mare lifts her head and neighs.*] Whoa, there! That's my cld Pollie, that is, starving in the frost. Banboxes, hold-'em-alls, tips and tops, and ridicules there may have been, but that poor dead an' gone Miss Susan were a leddy, she were. . . . I'll wait outside.

[*A dubious whinnying rises faint and shrill out of the midst of the woods. The children stand, stock-still, listening. Ann trots off to the little window, mounts a chair, and looks out.*]

Tony [*boldly*].

Only the wind. That means snow. Come along, Frances!

[*They emerge furtively through the door to the right, carrying candles. Sallie takes Ann to the fire and sits her in the ingle-nook.*]

Sallie.

There, Mummikins, warm your ten toes!

[*Singing.*]

There sate Good Queen Bess, oh
A-shining on her throne.
Up, Jessie; down, docket,
My money's gone!

Another brandy ball? One, two, and in goes you!

Ann [*crunching up her brandy ball*].

If we was all to wake up here, Sallie, everything—everything would be a dream.

Sallie.

Wake up, Mummikins? We mustn't. We just simply mustn't. I couldn't bear it. [*She ecstatically whisks up a candle-*

stick, then pauses, drops a solemn, half-mocking little curtsey as if to some one in her mind, and kneels down before the trunk.] Now for the purse. My gracious goodness, if I have *lost it.* [*She pulls a large key out of her bodice by a black ribbon, unlocks the trunk, and pushes back its red-lined lid. The voices of Frances and Tony are heard within, hollowly calling. One by one Sallie tugs out Ann's dolls.*] There, Nann: Sarah —Samivel—Elspeth—Oddsboddikins. Poor Oddsboddikins's nose is the least little bit flattened, *and* which all comes of kissing the *back* of Sallie's clothes-brush. [*She sits on her heels, talking to herself.*] You *must* know if I didn't just go on talking nonsense I simply couldn't bear it: I couldn't. And as for responsibility, you keep on saying it; but you must know it's there —all the time.

Ann [*to her dolls*].

Dear, dear Sarah. We's in the country. Crossings now. . . . [*She suddenly crouches in, as if petrified.*] Please, Sallie, is this a *drorin'*-room?

Sallie [*burrowing into the trunk and scattering out, higgledy-piggledy, clothes, combs, shoes, goloshes, brushes, sponge-bags, etc.*].

A drawing-room? No, no, no.

Ann.

Then I may have *all* my dollies here? I like this place, I do. I like places what are not drorin'-rooms.

[*She arranges her dolls in a row, their feet towards the fire. Frances and Tony return laden with spoil from the pantry and store-cupboards.*]

Frances and Tony [*chanting in unison*].

SHE ISN'T!

All the little beds are made,
And not on one is Auntie laid:
All the little beds are *made,*
And not on *one* is Auntie laid:
All the little beds are made,
And *not on one* is AUNTIE laid.

Frances.

We've searched everywhere—over, under, up, and in. The sweetest, cosiest, lonesomest rooms. And the kitchen! Tombstone floor, *enormous* copper pots and pans, Jack-and-the-Beanstalk crockery—bootjacks, warming-pans, hams and cheeses; jams, jellies and jorams; bins, bottles and blunderbi. And there, Sallie, peeping and whiskering at us from where the cuckoo comes out of the clock—a Mouse, my dear. It can't—it *can't* be real. [*She blows her nose.*] Excuse me, elder sister, Sallina Lunn; it makes me cry.

Sallie [*emerging once more out of the trunk like a seal out of the water*].

There. I knew it was safe somewhere. Now we must pay the cabman. Will you, Tony? I think it comes best from a man.

Tony.

How much?

Sallie.

Oh, he'd know that. But then, perhaps, don't you think, give him double? I am sure he *means* to be a civil man.

[*Tony goes out, but hastily reappears.*]

Tony.

I say. The old boy's sitting up there in the stars like a toadstool—fast asleep. And, Pollie, too, sighing like a grampus. Why did you open the doors?

Frances and Sallie.

What doors?

Tony.

The cab doors.

Frances and Sallie.

But we didn't!

Tony [*staring*].

They are wide open *now*. And such a queer smell in the cab —like roots—bracken-roots, and moss, and mould. Like woods, you know. There's rabbits in the garden, too. One hopped out as I popped in.

Ann [*to herself*].

Wabbits. Wabbits. [*She mounts up to the window again, making a curious little persuasive whistling noise.*]

Sallie.

Rabbits, Tony; I always thought they hi—hibernated. Perhaps Aunt Susan used to feed them. [*To herself.*] And now—the cabman. [*With a resolute set of her small head she goes towards the window, but is transfixed midway by the discovery—on a low stool under the curtains—of an infinitesimal greenish bottle filled with a pale green liquor, and, round about it, minute goblets. Out in this comparative darkness their crystal gleams strangely, like concentrated starlight. She whispers*—] France, quick. Did you ever see anything so perfectly magical and lovely? To think we never noticed them before.

[*The children gather round the little stool, gazing.*]

Ann [*nodding her head*].

I know what that is, Sallie. That's what the little dwarveses were drinking in the picture of Snow-white.

[*Frances pours a trickle of the wine into one of the goblets, and lifts it to her nose.*]

Frances.

Smell, Sallie. Like . . . wild roses—honeysuckle.

Sallie.

No . . . wood violets . . . I can't think . . . We mustn't *taste* it.

Tony [*sniffing*].

Oh, oh, oh!

Ann.

That makes Nann's head go round, that does. That smells like Honey.

[*Balancing the glass a little dizzily, Tony tiptoes out to rouse the cabman. Mr. Widge follows him in, cocking a drowsy eye at the tiny glass held up to his nose in his enormous red-mittened fist. With a sustained wink at Tony he drains it at a gulp; and subsides instantly into a profound reverie.*]

Mr. Widge [*as if out of a swoon*].

Now what I says is this, leddies and gennlemen—leastways, *one* gennleman—it's three score years and ten or more as the crow flies since Joseph Widge were of a age when it weren't no consequence in a manner of speaking what kind of an age he *were*. *So* high. And now . . . [*with infinite mournfulness*] melted. That's what I say . . . melted . . . to the very cockles. It's round us; round us—you and me and all of us. Open your eyes in your innocent cranimums, and *see*. You *ask* me? Well, then, what I says is, maybe Crossings Woods *is* Crossings Woods—trees, in a manner of speaking, sticking up out of the ground, t'other by which, criss-cross and the more the merrier; and *yet*, and *yet*, leddies and gennlemen [*he stoops*

almost double, his head thrust out of his capes], there's more there than what meets the eye. As for its being dead of night and cold so as you can't count your bones snapping and you all packed tight as little fishes in my old cab not to mention the luggage, why five and twenty shillin's, miss, and thankie kindly, which is less than half price and not a *na*-penny for the toddleums. . . . And when me old friend Widge says "there," he means [*raising his capes like a vulture*] *everywhere*. . . .

Sallie [*with a deep sigh*].

Everywhere, Mr. Widge. Thank you, Mr. Widge. I'm sure that must be *very* reasonable.

[*She counts out the money into his hand. He is groping his way out when Ann tugs him by the sleeve.*]

Ann.

That's a brandy ball, Mr. Widge. That's for poor Pollie-out-in-the-cold.

[*Mr. Widge, stretching out his hand, on which lies the brandy ball, beams round on them all like a winter sunset.*]

Mr. Widge.

May Him who made the very first hoss that munched oats in the Ark bless your kindly nature, missikins. Fol de rol, fol de rol, fol de rol, lol, O! Good-night, all.

All.

Good-night, Mr. Widge.

[*The sound of the cab rolling away dies out in the frozen silence.*]

Sallie [*apprehensively*].

Would you ever believe, France, the least little drop of wine like that in that enormous cabman . . . ? We must be very, very careful of it.

Tony [*pouring out some private decoction from a great saucepan on the fire*].

Come along, children. Supper.

[*Sallie and Frances seat themselves on the floor by the hearth. Ann meanwhile has secretly licked out the last flavour of the wine from Mr. Widge's glass, and stands, eyes shut, smacking her lips. When she opens them again, she discovers a little letter, cock-hat-shape, that has fallen off the table on to the floor. She sits down and examines it in the frostlight.*]

Sallie [*uneasily*].

Twenty-five shillings. It *seems* a good deal, France; for half price, you know; and not counting Nann. Still, the cabman *would* know best; though Father said . . . A most curious thing—I was thinking of him just now, and of Aunt—Aunt—*you* know; and trying to *really* hope she was being as happy as we are, and I couldn't, I simply couldn't remember her name.

Tony [*his mouth full of biscuit*].

Susan, silly.

Frances [*mopping her face*].

I do wish you'd swallow your own crumbs, Tony.

Sallie.

No, not Aunt Susan. Bayswater—that Aunt. It's the smell of that curious wine, I suppose. All I can just remember is that it began with an A.

Tony [*steadily*].

I love my Aunt with an A because she's amiable and—all a-blowing and a-growing; I hate her with an A because she's a little bit too angelic and ar-ar-stocratic. I took her to the

sign of the Ape and—Antelope, and treated her to artichokes and—and—'ash. Her name is er—er—er . . .

Ann [*sneezing in the cold at the window*].

A-tishoo! [*They all burst out laughing. Ann creeps over behind Sallie and puts her hands over her eyes.*] Ann saw a star, a 'normous star. It wunk at Ann out of the wood. And there—there—was a—what do you think? Three guesses, Sallie.

Sallie.

A pair of glass slippers.

Ann.

No.

Sallie.

A Jinn in a bottle.

Ann.

No.

Sallie.

I *can't* think. Tell me, Mummikins, I'm seeing such catherine wheels in my head.

Ann.

A letter, Sallie—from the Fairies.

Sallie.

A letter! And addressed to *me*. "Miss Sarah Wildersham, Crossings." Who can it be from? [*She opens it and looks for the signature.*] France. Tony. What a sorrowful thing. It's from Aunt Susan. As if . . . [*She reads it aloud.*]

"My dear Sallie,

"I write these lines in the room in which I hope you will read them—though when, I do not know. Not very far away, perhaps. They are to say, How-do-you-do to you all, and Welcome, and to tell you not to be too much cast down by the little

troubles and cares of this world, and especially if you bring such troubles on yourselves. Have courage and walk straight through them every one. Your dear mother was my only sister; and what I am hoping is that you will all be comfortable in the little old house where she and I were born, and where we spent our childhood together. Be as happy as you may, and as wise as you can; and be these both together. Saturday's child worked hard for a living, but I expect she had a little rest on Sunday. There, that isn't a very long sermon, is it? Good-bye, my dear Sallie; and I send you and your sisters and your brother my regard and affection, and remain

"Your affectionate aunt, Susan.

"P.S.—A kiss for little Ann."

[*Sallie sits stooping low over the letter. She draws Ann close, and kisses her.*]

Sallie.

There, precious, precious Mummikins, I give you Aunt Susan's kiss; and we will try to make each other happy, won't we?

Tony [*ladling out black-currant jam with a large wooden spoon*].

We will. What's more, Sallie, there's nobody here, so it looks as if we were going to be alone for a bit, so we must share out the work. I'll do the fires, and perhaps the boots, and chop down the trees and chop up the logs and explore and pluck the poultry.

Frances.

I'll make the beds and look after the larder and do all the cooking—potatoes in their jackets, Tony, and dripping toast and mince-pies and—and tipsy cake!

Sallie.

And I'll help in *everything,* and do the mending and the housekeeping and the tradesmen and look after Mummikins.

Ann.

And Ann'll polish up *all* the candlesticks and all the coal-skukkles and wind up all the clocks. Please, Sallie, may I wind up all the clocks *now?*

Sallie.

Very soon, Mummikins.

Tony.

And keep them an hour fast in the morning and an hour slow in the evening. Jiminy, France, if it hadn't been for the mumps. . . .

Sallie [*broodingly*].

I didn't think, France, I could ever—ever be so happy. On the very verge, you know. It's as if one had died and . . . How strangely still the house is, and the cold, starry garden. I hardly dare breathe.

Frances.

Time is so queer. Six hours ago we were kissing poor Father good-bye under that hideous old portico. Six hours ago it was Bayswater. Can you believe that the house is *there*—there *now?* Who is to tell us that this isn't a dream? I think, Sallie, if I were to wake up now in—in Bayswater, I should never forgive you. I should just numb off like stone, in my bed.

Sallie.

Who knows, France? Perhaps we are just people in a story.

Ann.

Then us will *all* be changed into wild swans, Sallie, and fly—fly away over the trees to the sea. [*She rocks herself to and fro as if she heard the unending lullaby of the tides.*] S-sh. S-sh.

Tony.

I say, I'm getting the creeps.

Sallie [*scrambling to her feet*].

D.P.L.
-with sleep-ridden eyes peers-

So am I, Tony. If we go on moaning like this we shall fall asleep in real earnest. *Look* at the muddle—all mine. Come along, France; come along, Tony. We must keep the house as if Aunt Susan were coming back at the very next minute. I'll tidy, and you go up and choose the bedrooms. And, don't you think, France, as it's so warm and cosy here by the fire, we might make a little bed for Mummikins in that chair, and I'll curl up on the settle? Would you like that, Nann?

Ann [*out of a yawn*].

Please, Sallie. Then you and me'll wake up and see the moon shining; and hear the wind. [*Sallie busies herself about the room. Frances and Tony, laden with clothes out of the trunk, go off with candles by the door at the left. Sallie undresses Ann to her petticoats, swathes her up in a big dressing-gown and tucks her up in an armchair.*]

Sallie.

There, you sweet-old-Sallikins'-only-joy, *so* sleepy. Say prayers; and Sallie shall sing you hush-a-bye on that queer little old piano? [*With little ceremonious gestures she one by one blows out the candles. Ann nods. Sallie is just about to sit down at the spinet when Frances' voice is heard calling her from above. She goes out.*]

[*The long low room is lit now only by the smouldering firelight. In its further shadowiness becomes visible the ghostly figure that appeared to be in watch for the children. Suddenly Ann starts out of her first sleep with a cry, wriggles up into her chair, and kneeling with sleep-ridden eyes peers over the top of it at the interloper, who smiles gently at her out of a quiet old peaceful face.*]

Ann.

Does you live here, if you please? . . . You must be very, very lonely all alone. . . . You standin' 'stremely far off from the fire. *Please* come and warm yourself.

[*The ghost lightly raises her hands as if unwilling or forbidden to approach nearer. Ann frowns and rubs her eyes.*]

Ann can't see you all the time, because her eyes go round and round.

[*Sallie comes softly in.*]

Ann [*to ghost*].

Why, now, you's gone!

Sallie [*puts her arms about the child*].

There, Nann, there; you are dreaming, sweetheart.

Ann [*indignantly*].

Nann *not* dreaming, Sallie. She smiled at me, she did; but O, so lonely.

Sallie [*whispering and glancing uneasily over her shoulder*].

Who, my sweet, who is lonely? where?

Ann [*drooping to sleep again and muttering drowsily*].

The little—old—lady—of—course. And you *said* you would sing for me. . . . [*The small plaintive voice ebbs into silence. Sallie covers the child up; then, lifting her candle, opens the door opposite to that by which Frances has gone out and calls faintly.*]

Sallie.

Who is that, please? Is any one there?

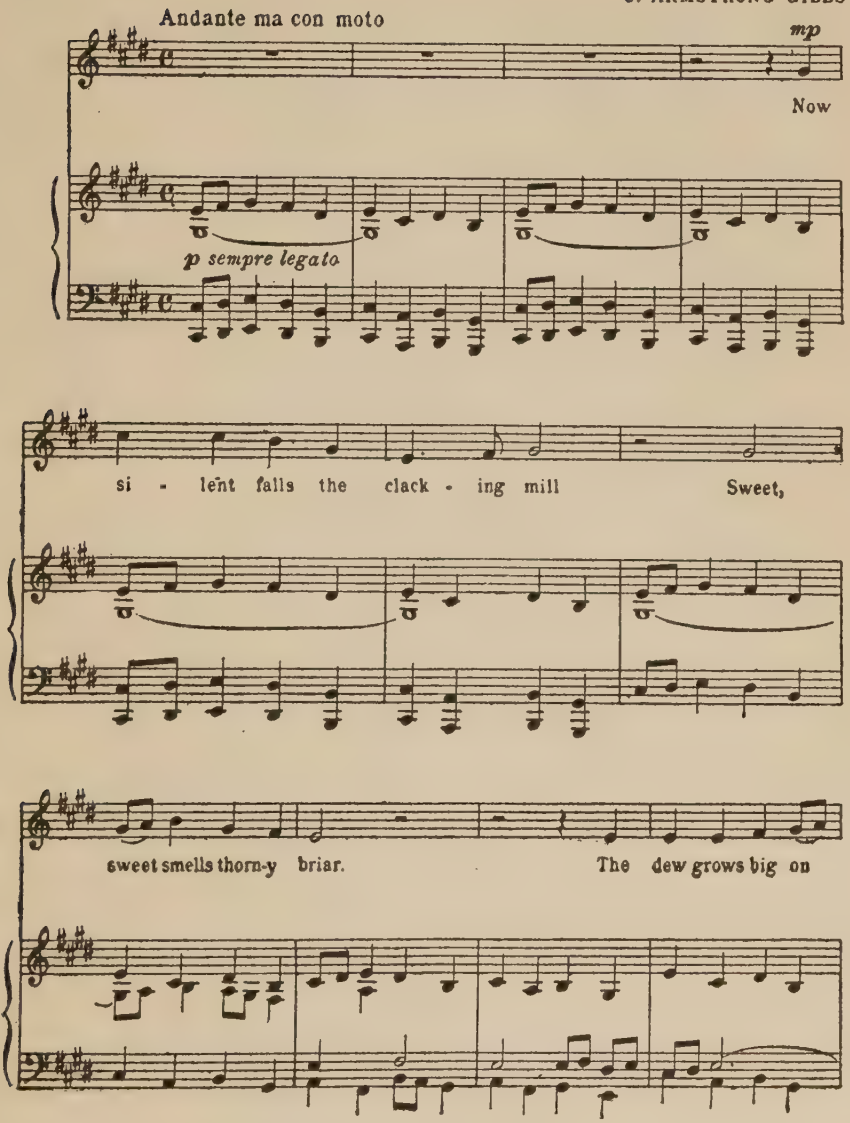
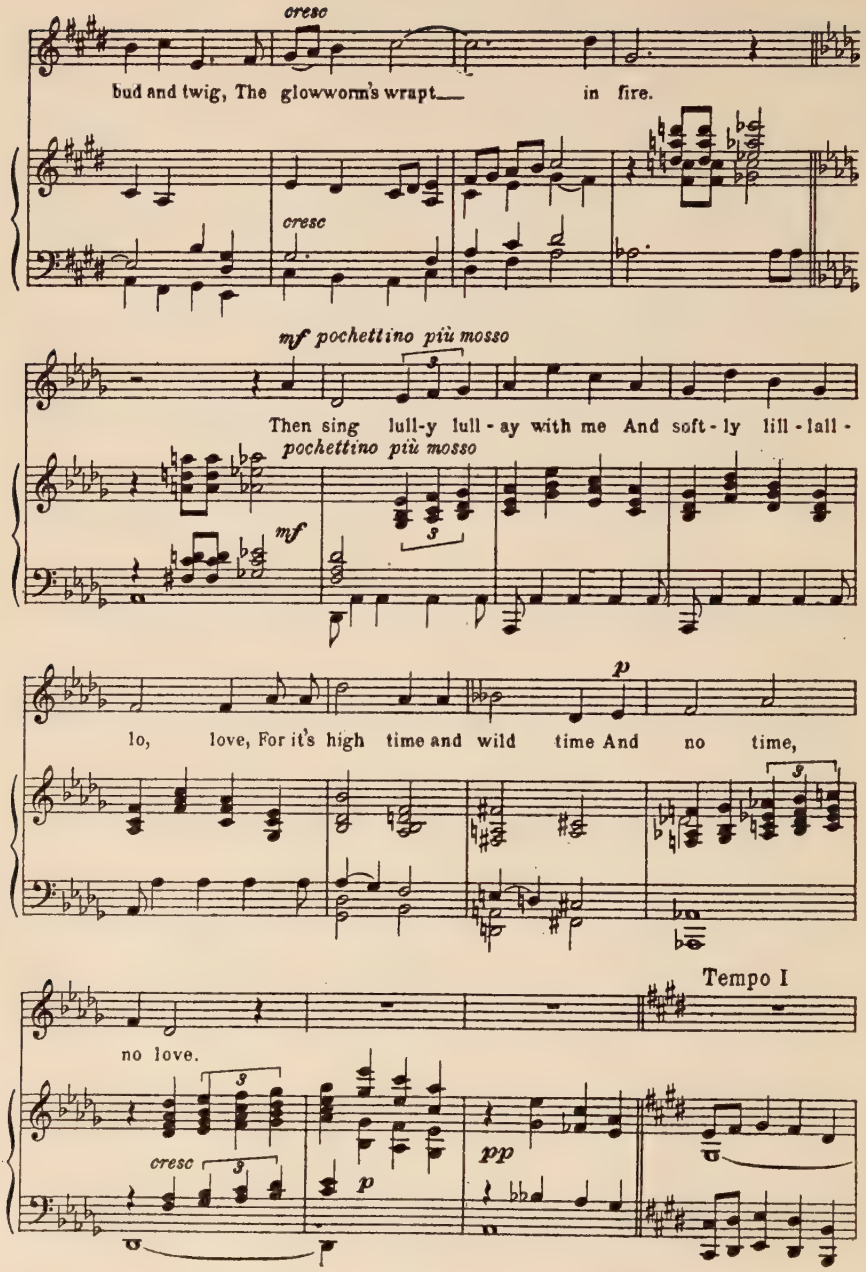
[*Silence. She locks the door; then lifts her candle higher, peers towards the dark window and mocks in a small voice at her reflection there.*]

Ghosts, indeed. Silly Sallie. Silly Sallie.

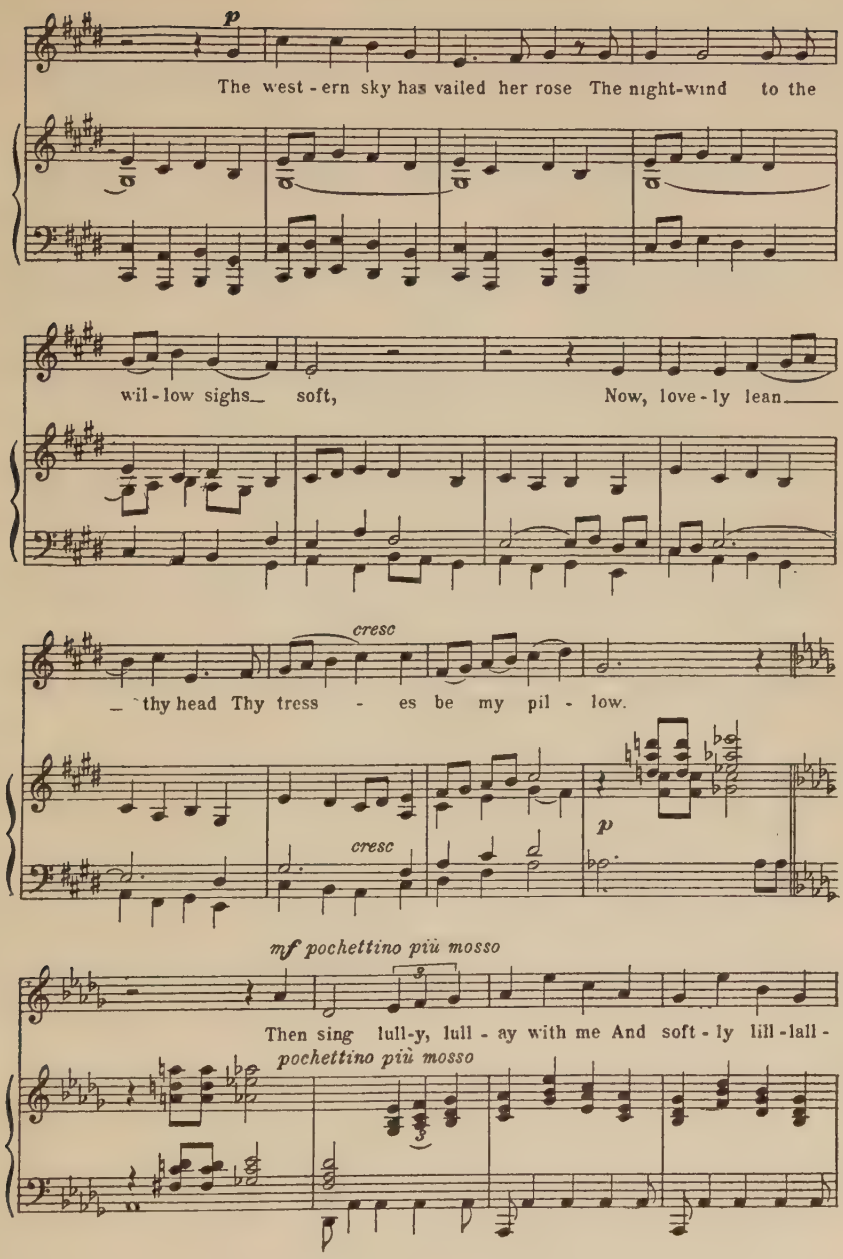
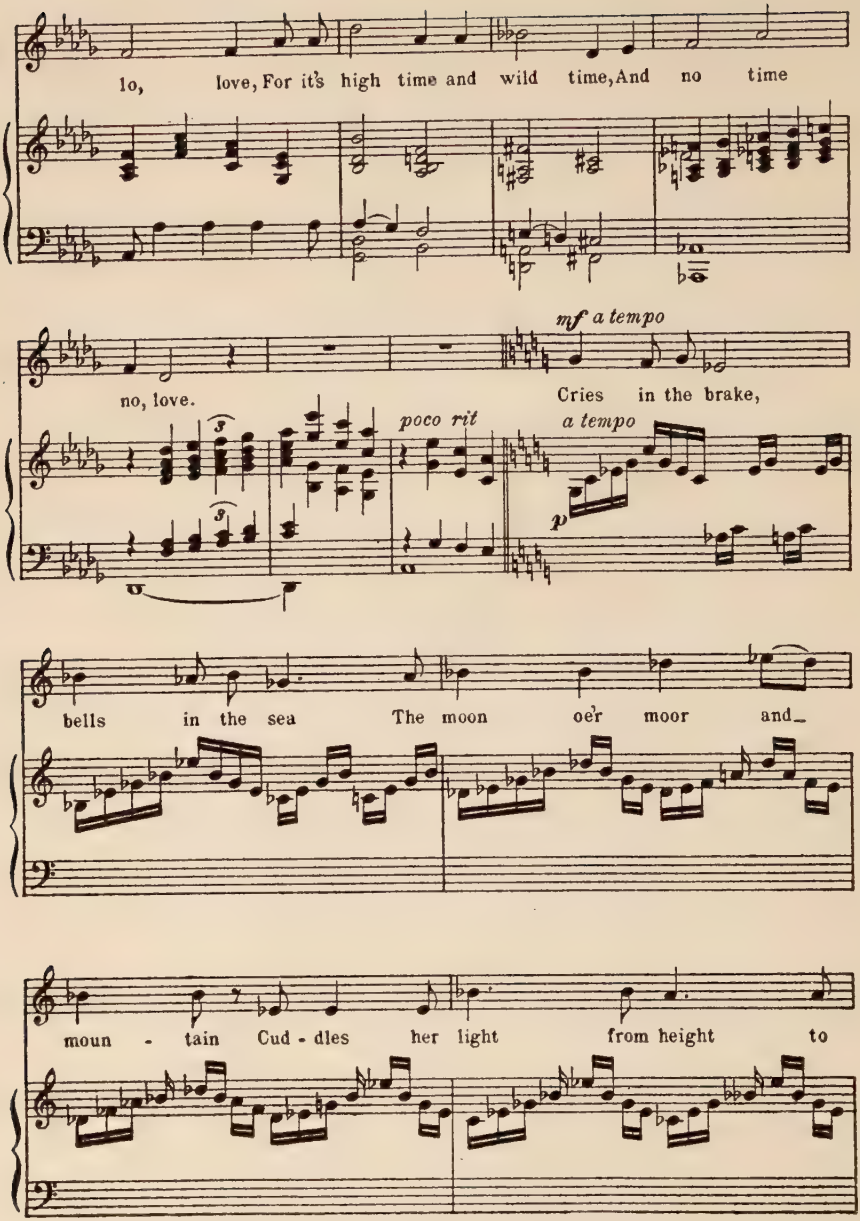
[*She kneels down for a moment or two beside Ann, then seats herself at the spinet. The tinkling keys sound like a faintly cantankerous voice reawakened out of a quiet, centuries old.*]

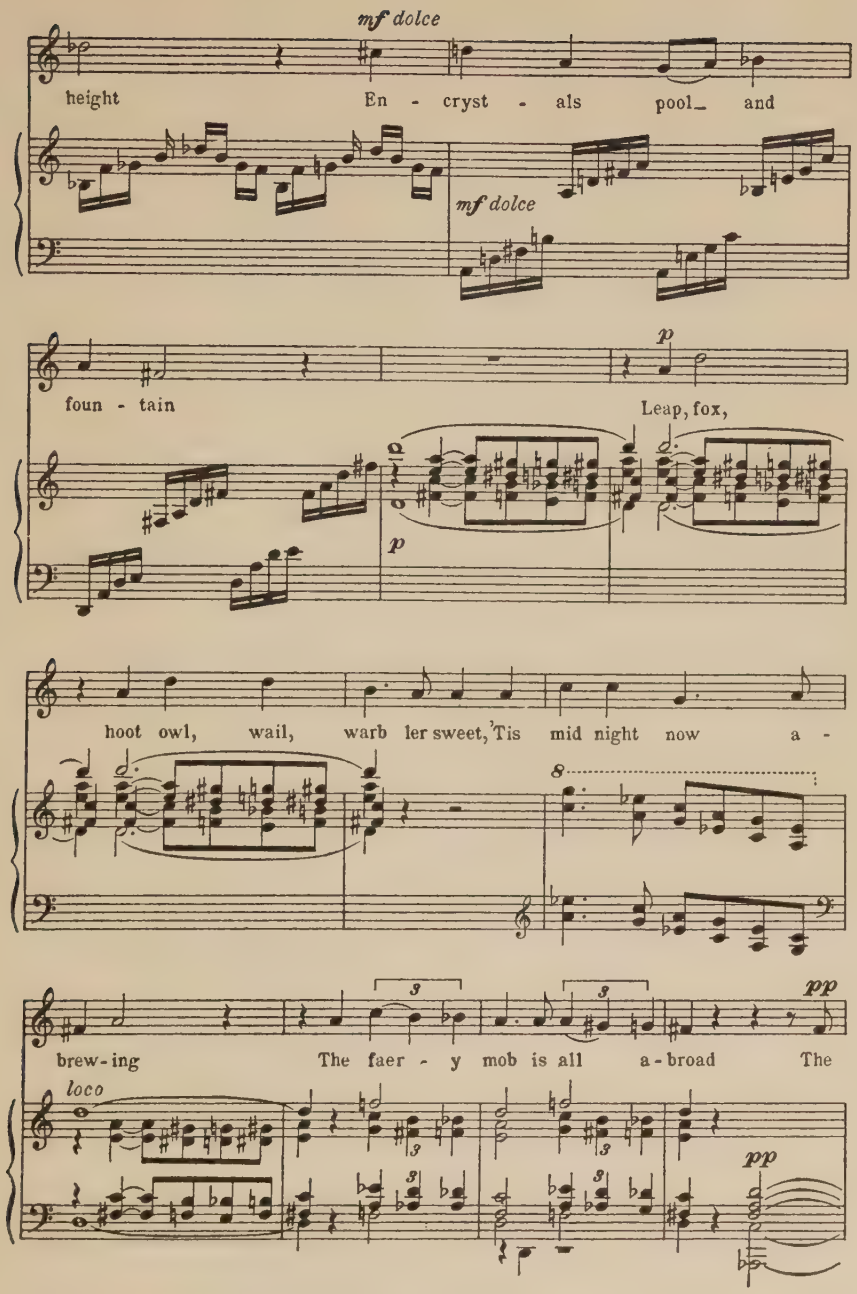
Lullaby
(Sallie)

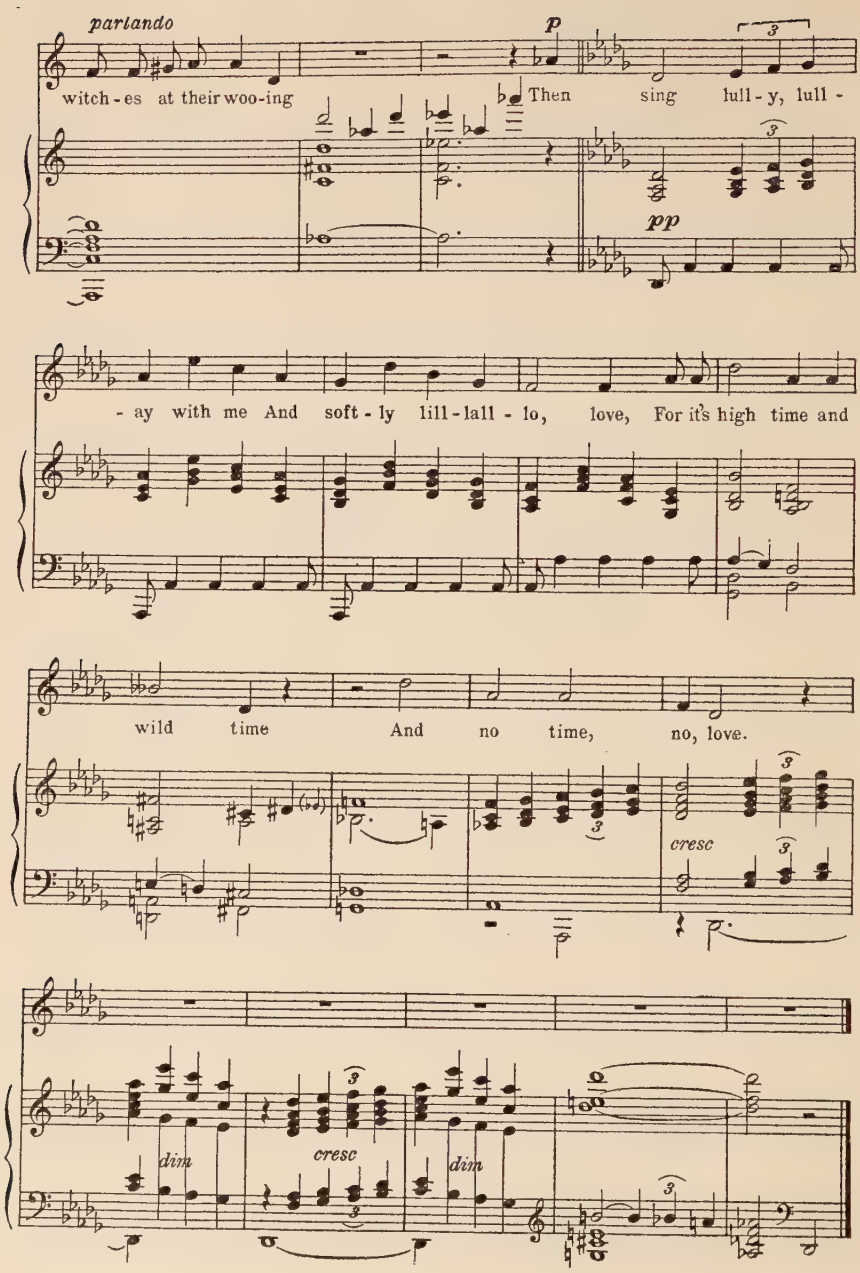
C. ARMSTRONG GIBBS



cresc
bud and twig, The glowworm's wrapt in fire.
cresc
mf pochettino più mosso
Then sing lull-y lull - ay with me And soft - ly lill - lall -
pochettino più mosso
mf
3
lo, love, For it's high time and wild time And no time,
p
3
Tempo I
no love.
3
cresc
3
p
pp


p
The west - ern sky has vailed her rose The night-wind to the
wil - low sighs soft, Now, love - ly lean
cresc
thy head Thy tress - es be my pil - low.
cresc
p
mf pochettino più mosso
Then sing lull-y, lull - ay with me And soft - ly lill - lall -
pochettino più mosso

lo, love, For it's high time and wild time, And no time
mf a tempo
no, love.
Cries in the brake,
poco rit
a tempo
p
bells in the sea The moon oe'r moor and_
moun - tain Cud - dles her light from height to


mf dolce
height
En - cryst - als pool_ and
mf dolce
p
foun - tain
Leap, fox,
p
hoot owl, wail, warb ler sweet, 'Tis mid night now a -
8
pp
brew - ing
The faer - y mob is all a - broad
The
loco
pp


parlando
p
witch - es at their woo-ing
Then sing lull - y, lull -
pp
- ay with me And soft - ly lill - lall - lo, love, For it's high time and
wild time And no time, no, love.
cresc
dim
cresc
dim

Now silent falls the clacking mill;
Sweet—sweeter smells the briar;
The dew wells big on bud and twig;
The glow-worm's wrapt in fire.

Then sing, lully, lullay, with me,
And softly, lill-lall-lo, love,
'Tis high time, and wild time,
And no time, no, love!

The Western sky has vailed her rose;
The night-wind to the willow
Sigheth, "Now lovely, lean thy head,
Thy tresses be my pillow!"

Then sing, lully, lullay, with me,
And softly, lill-lall-lo, love,
'Tis high time, and wild time,
And no time, no, love!

Cries in the brake, bells in the sea:
The moon o'er moor and mountain
Cruddles her light from height to height,
Bedazzles pool and fountain.

Leap, fox; hoot, owl; wail, warbler sweet,
'Tis midnight now's a-brewing;
The fairy mob is all abroad,
And witches at their wooing.

Then sing, lully, lullay, with me,
And softly, lill-lall-lo, love,
'Tis high time, and wild time,
And no time, no, love.

[*During the last refrain the nearer door has stealthily opened, admitting Frances, attired in a high frilled bed-cap, swaying, balloon-like skirts, and silks and shawls sheening with as many colours as Joseph's coat. She twirls in a soundless pirouette to the music.*]

Sallie [*turns and sees her*].

France! How you startled me.

Frances.

Sallie, Sallie; my angel, my own! I could dance the eyes out of my head. You can have no notion how that tinkle-tinkle-tankle skips echoing up into those hundreds of little old empty rooms and corridors—empty and empty. Sleep? not me! Dream *this* side, say I, when you can.

Sallie.

But France, you mad thing, what on earth have you on?

Frances.

Well, I was just sick to death of Aunt—Aunt Bayswater's taste in frocks. Oh, how they jeered at me at school. It really is *very* queer; I discovered that if you turn them inside out like this (and, mercy! what isn't inside out in this delicious old topsy-turvy dream of a house?) you look—so. It means, Sallie, that even Aunt's *dressmaker* must have rebelled.

Sallie.

But the night-cap? and those marvellous shawls?

Frances.

All out of the wardrobe in the *third* little room *down* the corridor, past the enormous, *enormous* bowl of potpourri on the teeny tiny window-sill, looking *out* on the dovecote. One was cooing, cooing, Sallie, like this—as if to that nibble of moon we saw in the train that's sunk down under the woods.

Sallie.

But you never saw such a sight.

Frances.

But I *have* seen such a sight—in the long looking glass. . . .

Sallie
D.P.L

That's what frightened me, Sallie. [*She lays her finger on her lips with wide-open eyes.*]

Sallie.

Frightened you? What?

Frances.

Why, I could have vowed I saw an old, old smiling ghostly face peering into the glass with me over my shoulder.

Sallie [*to herself*].

And Ann too. But, my dear, it's friendly—the house, the wind, the very tick of that old clock out there, even the cabman's old white rattle-ribbed Pollie. They are friendly, France; and if we only love them enough, I feel in the very bones of me they'll love us too. "Inside out," that's it. And I'll—I'll be *dashed,* France, if I don't go and do the same. Why shouldn't we? Oh, how I have wasted myself. It's *freedom:* and to-morrow may never come. But hush, we mustn't wake Ann.

[*As soon as she is gone, Frances, laying her hands upon the air, is once more beginning to rotate, when Tony abruptly appears as if straight out of the Arabian Nights—a turkish towel for turban round his head, an old scimitar stuck in his silk sash, his face as black as a chimney. He strides forward, snatching up his school top-hat and rattling a tattoo on it as if it were a drum.*]

Tony.

Princess! the hour is late;
The horses wait
By the br-r-razen gate.
It is our fate;
We must away!

[*With a last derisive thump he concertinas his hat and flings it into the fire.*]

Frances.

Bold Prince, avaunt!
I have an Aunt;
She's pale and gaunt,
And says, I caun't.

Oh, Tony, Tony, I could dance myself into my grave. And listen, listen, surely that cannot be only the rising of the wind?

Tony [*ferociously*].

The house is lone;
The trees do gr-r-roan
And wail and moan;
I'll seize the throne.
Ho! let's begone!

[*Sallie reappears arrayed in all the colours of the rainbow. They dance. And in the midst of their dancing the clock without tolls the first stroke of twelve. Solemnly they count the strokes and at the twelfth*—]

All.

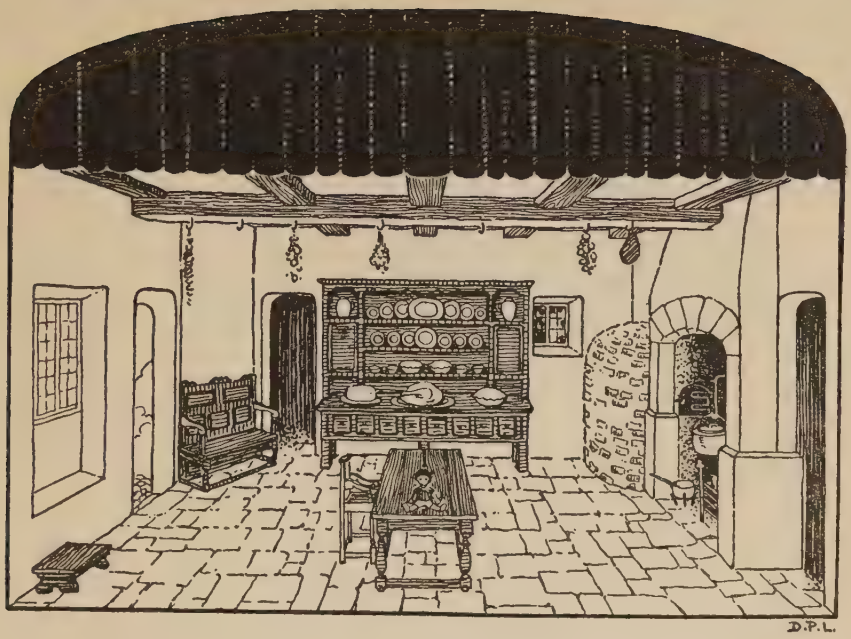
Midnight!

[*They stand aghast. The wind sweeps moaning round the benighted old house, as if burthened with the music of remote, inhuman instruments and voices.*]

CURTAIN

Act Three

Butcher . Baker . & . Candlestick-Maker



Act Three

Butcher, Baker and Candlestick-Maker

Time: 11 o'clock, and a frosty winter morning: the Twenty-first of December. Scene: An old-fashioned, bright-painted, stone-flagged sunny kitchen. Hams, bunches of herbs, strings of drying oat-cakes hang from the beams. To the left is a door leading into the house, and beyond it is a brick oven and a fireplace, its brass and steel merrily twinkling in the flamelight. Beyond the hearth is a casement window, festooned with ivy. At the back of the kitchen is an immense dresser, gaily bedangled with crockery, and flanked with huge cakes, a game pie, a goose, and so on. A door leads out to the pantry. On the right is another door, opening into a frosted, sunny, cobblestoned kitchen-garden. Between

these two doors is a settle. In the middle stands a kitchen table. A jug, with a branch of holly in it, is on tne table; pen, paper and ink; a pastry board, a pestle and mortar, a rolling-pin and a bag of flour; on the other side are Ann's dolls in a row and a high chair. Four hot water bottles, graduated in size, are somewhere in view.

[*A fairy appears in the entry, flaxen-haired, with skin white as frost, but carmine-cheeked and carmine-lipped. She is disguised as an old pedlar-woman in a shawl and a steeple hat bound round with Elf flowers, and peeps and peers in at the door from out of the snowy garden. At length she enters, and looks secretly about her, as if furtively seeking for what she cannot find.*]

Fairy [*calling softly in what appears to be her own tongue*].

Eela garjah mimsy m-m-m. . . . Eela garjah mimsy m-m-m!

[*With odd gestures, she puts a posy of Elf flowers beside Ann's dolls, and at the sound of whistling disappears.*]

[*Mr. Budge's head appears at the casement window. He comes round to the door and knocks with his knuckles, softly whistling the while the tune of "Bonnie Dundee." He is a stoutish, reddish, cheerful man, of the true-blue tradition of butchers, with a shining face, fringed with whiskers; and he is dressed in a butcher's blue apron with a scarf wound round his neck.*]

Frances [*calling from above*].

Sal-lie! Sal-lie! Mr. Budge in the kitch-en. [*Sallie enters in gay colours—her Bayswater dress "inside out"—under an apron. Her hair is tied up with cherry-coloured ribbons.*]

Sallie.

Good-morning, Mr. Budge. Please come in. And what a lovely, lovely morning.

—looks secretly about her—

Mr. B. [*gallantly accepting her invitation*].

'Tis so. A wunnerful fine morning, miss; and thank 'ee kindly. Trees and hedgerows that bedizened with hoar-frost you might be best man at a wedding. Nine degrees of frost, miss, and that *slippy,* old bones must tread cautious-like.

Sallie.

Please sit down, Mr. Budge; if you are sure you can spare the time.

Mr. B.

Time *no* object, miss, when'm's ticking your bright smiles away. I've come, miss, not for orders. [*He reads rapidly and a little shamefacedly from a long red tradesman's book, which he afterwards deposits on the table.*] Three fat turkeys; five fat fowl; four fat duck; nine pound pork sausages; twenty pound sirloin (lean) ; two leg of mutton (lean) ; and one choice, fat, Datchover goose. [*Sallie looks alarmed.*] Now do 'ee know, miss, I think, maybe, with the other little fiddle-faddles, there's enough there on order, miss, so to speak, as should see you all well into the New Year—treated cautious-like. No, miss: *not* orders. [*He produces two sheets of foolscap from an inner pocket, which, with precautionary glances around him, he stealthily pushes across the table.*] I've brought 'ee the second, the *suppermentary,* list—as promised—for the Grand Party, miss.

Sallie.

O, Mr. Budge, it *is* good of you! The very thing! We have sent off the others. And Mrs. Budge really doesn't think there would be any harm in sending invitations—to all these children—even if we don't know any of them?

Mr. B.

Harm, miss! Nohow.

Sallie [*sagaciously arguing down her own hesitation*].

Of course, Mr. Budge, I know one doesn't usually ask strangers to a party. But this won't be a *grand* party; not a Ball, Mr. Budge. And no one isn't a stranger as soon as one's a friend, is one? And this *is* the country, isn't it? Not like London, where nobody, you know, knows anybody until he knows the other person is known to the kind of person he knows. Not even one's neighbours. I can't imagine, Mr. Budge, what I should have done if you had been just a—just a—if you hadn't been a friend, too.

Mr. B. [*hastily*].

'Tis so; 'tis so, miss. Oh, 'ess, it's the country, sure enough.

Sallie.

Just look at the morning! That dazzling snow! I just keep saying, "Thank you, thank you." And what a sweet cold smell the garden sheds—just as if frost-flowers . . . I'm very glad God made the country, Mr. Budge. And so much of it.

Mr. B. [*piously*].

'Tis so, miss. And a wunnerful fine job of it, too; taken altogether.

Sallie [*a little anxiously*].

You didn't by any chance meet my brother, Mr. Budge? [*Mr. Budge looks very solemn, hand to chin, and head on one side.*]

Mr. B.

A square set-up young gennulman? Furry cap, leggin's, carryin' a gun?

Sallie [*eagerly*].

Yes.

Mr. B. [*blandly*].

Well, between you, me and the deep blue sea, miss, No. But there, I'm a 'stonishin' poor obsarver, out of bounds. He'm all safe, miss. He'll follow his stummick. 'Tis so.

Sallie [*reading slowly from list*].

Miss Arabella-Louisa-Sopho-sopho-nisba Minch. What a mouth—er—what a remarkable name!

Mr. B.

Very partickler leddy: daughter of my Lady Minch. Bullock a week, reg'lar. Lives up at the Hall. We couldn't do without *her*. But being so open to every eye, miss, so to speak, I forgot her in my first.

Sallie.

And of course your own little girl is coming, Mr. Budge? Jemima, isn't it?

Mr. B.

Je-mima, miss; Mimmie, so called; and, bless my soul, Pollie, too, when she's partickler good. Sartin sure, she'm coming, miss, if you be so kind as to have her.

Sallie [*ingenuously*].

Has the—has the Candlestick-maker any—er—nieces, or nephews, or Godchildren, or that kind of thing?

Mr. B.

Not benownst to me. Not a Crossings man, miss. Queer chap, too.

Sallie [*with suppressed enthusiasm*].

Isn't he? I suppose he couldn't make a living, I mean not a real living, *only* in Crossings, could he? Candlesticks wear out so very, very slowly, Mr. Budge. He knows all the country

places—villages, houses, streams, woods, hills, everything, right down to the very tip of Land's End. He's calling this morning: so is Mr. Honeyman. Mr. Honeyman is going to give my sister Frances a lesson in jam tarts.

Mr. B. [*with symptoms of jealousy*].

Honeyman, eh! Now if the young gennulman fancies anything in the butchering line . . .

[*A dismal cough is heard, and Mr. Honeyman's head appears at window.*]

Sallie.

Here *is* Mr. Honeyman.

[*Mr. Honeyman raps on the door, though he is in full view. He is a long, lank, cadaverous man, with black hair, and is dressed in a cardigan jacket and an apron white with flour.*]

Sallie.

Good-morning, Mr. Honeyman. Do come in and rest a moment. We were just talking of you, weren't we, Mr. Budge? "Angels," you know.

Mr. H. [*with booming, lugubrious voice*].

Morning, miss. Co-old. Morning, Mr. Budge. Angels, miss? Not me; least-wise, not this side of Jordan. I've called, miss, on pleasure bent, so to speak; signifying *not* business. [*He reads from a long red tradesman's book, which he afterwards deposits on the table.*] What with the plum cakes, iced cakes, macaroons, archangels, buns, three dozen currant, six dozen Bath (no plain) and the mince pies, and the cheese-cakes, *and* the maids-of-honour—well, miss, the bakery's all of a smoke. [*Sallie clasps her hands in dismay. Mr. Honeyman drops his voice, and hands her an enormous envelope.*] Mrs. Honeyman's sent 'ee list No. 2—the secret list, miss, as promised—for the Party.

Sallie.

Oh, thank you, Mr. Honeyman. That's just what I wanted.

Mr. H. [*dismally*].

Very welcome, miss, I'm sure. [*To Budge.*] Ever since that morning, Mr. Budge, when the young leddy give us that sippet of green, flowery-smellin' wine—and me as good as tee-total these twenty years, and no more than on and off my death-bed, so to speak—why [*with a deep breath*] it *unfroze* me, out and in—clouds *and* cares *and* cobwebs. I've been a ten-year younger man for it, Mr. Budge.

Mr. B.

'Tis so. [*Musingly.*] A thrillin' balsam for sure. [*Aside to Honeyman.*] And that's why Mrs. Budge she says to me, "Take along the book with 'ee, Budge, in black and white, just to *warn* the poor morsel."

Mr. Honeyman.

Ay. Ay. . . .

Sallie [*gazing at Mr. Honeyman's list, but with far-away eyes, thinking of the two books*].

Mr. Honeyman!

Mr. H.

Meanin' me, miss, to be sure.

Sallie.

Was my Aunt Susan a—a great *eater?*

Mr. H.

Eater, miss? Well, now; eater? Which is to say loaves, cakes, rusks, biscuits, ancetera per day per week *per rannum.* That's what might be called a con-nun-drum, miss. There was

she, poor leddy; there was the three maids—growed in their respectful ages about her like willows round a tombstone. There was old Tom Weatherill the gardener *and* the boy. Eaters one and all, miss. [*Very sagaciously.*] But to substract and divide the summum total, miss, per happetite! Well, as I was saying, there I'm *asked.* Be I by the book, Mr. Budge?

Mr. B.

Words bein' words, Mr. Honeyman, 'tis so. But age bein' age, miss, and teeth in the descendant, I'd say not a remarkable *meat*-eater. And now, poor dear leddy, she'm gone beyond it.

Sallie.

I *see.* But—but now, *Bills,* Mr. Budge. I've heard my father sometimes speak of bills, you know. And I suppose, of course, my Aunt Susan was very particular. She just *settled,* I mean.

Mr. B.

Settled, miss. The very word. And reg'lar! Think of that, Mr. Honeyman. [*Mr. Honeyman violently shakes his head, but Mr. Budge blunders on.*] Mebbe, now, miss, you put dainty head to window last night, and saw nigh full moon makin' as you might say a dead set at Crossings up aloft there?

Mr. H.

A fuller moon, considering her size, I never observed, this twenty year gone. A moon for lovyers, miss: and parted!

Mr. B.

'Tis so. Well, now, skies keepin' clear, and you in doo course with comely form at window, what do us—you, me and Mr. Honeyman yonder—what do us gage Providence on, come another month gone, *another* lunatic month?

Mr. John Budge
D.P.L.

Sallie [*ponders the riddle brightly*].

Why, full moon again, Mr. Budge!

Mr. B. [*slapping his leg, and with a rapturous guffaw*].

There, miss, I led 'ee to it. The wits of 'ee. "Full moon again, Mr. Budge!" [*In solemn triumph.*] Well, *that's* how Miss Susan paid her bills, miss: reg'lar as full moon. 'Tis so.

[*Sallie sits pale and wide-eyed, staring at the books.*]

Mr. H. [*uneasily*].

But there, miss, it weren't *Bills* Mr. Budge and me was making our call for in respects to which, it bein' agreed there's two sides to 'em, and the King's Head not bein' so to speak so much as come into *view.* No! What Mrs. Honeyman was takin' the liberty of suggesting is this ways. You've been so kind as to ax our little Emily to the party and all. She'm a neat quiet handy little soul; and remarkable wishful to come and give a hand to the housework. Hard soilin' work and pretty leddy's hands! There, miss, I'm not a noratory. She'd just jump for joy.

Sallie [*takes his hands*].

And we'd be overjoyed to have her, Mr. Honeyman. Not of course to work, but to *share.* Please tell Mrs. Honeyman . . .

Mr. H. [*interrupting*].

There, there, miss, say no more. It's the kind thoughts, the inward wishings of the heart! [*Confidentially.*] Three weeks ago come to-morrow—Doctor, he says to me, "Honeyman, what with your brooding only on the dark side, and with them teeth not being able to domesticate your food as a Christian should, and refusin' all physic, why, Honeyman," he says, "if you keep on like this, come Christmas you'll be in your grave or a madhouse." And now, miss, your kind thoughts and little

bottles and advice and such. But there, flattery never buttered no parsnips. [*Turns away; throws his hands up; and with fierce astonishment.*] There's customers here—why in Crossings, miss, as stick their proud noses into the Lord's Heaven fairly sniffin' for the Last Trump. [*Sits down exhausted.*]

Mr. B. [*ruminatingly*].

Ay, Mr. Honeyman; 'tis so, 'tis so.

[*Frances heard without.*]

Frances.

This way, Mr. Candlestick-maker; come along. [*Frances enters, peacocked up in brilliant colours, her Bayswater clothes "inside out," followed by the Candlestick-maker, one of the travellers between the world's rim and moonrise. He is dressed in a kind of long green cloak or habit and a wide hat, and carries an odd-shaped fiddle. Ann follows.*]

Frances.

Good-morning, Mr. Budge. Good-morning, Mr. Honeyman.

Ann.

Dood-mornin', Mr. Budge. Dood-mornin', Mr. Honeybee. The water in my lickle jug was ice this morning.

Mr. H. and Mr. B.

You don't say *so,* missie.

Ann [*discovering fairy flowers*].

O, Sallie, look, look, aren't they beeootiful? [*Aside.*] They's fairy flowers, they is.

Sallie.

O, thank you, Mr. Budge. How very kind of you!

Mr. B.

Not my givin', miss; though mebbe missie mid find a few berries on this fork of holly. [*He gives Ann a spray of holly.*]

Sallie.

Then they must be from *you,* Mr. Honeyman. Aren't they lovely?

Mr. H.

Not me, miss, but here's a kissin'-green sprigget of mistletoe Em'ly put in my hat for the little leddikin. [*He gives her a sprig of mistletoe.*]

Sallie.

Who can have put them there, then? [*She shows them to the Candlestick-maker, who examines them curiously.*]

Frances [*rolling up her sleeves, and waving the rolling-pin*].

Ready, aye ready, Mr. Honeyman. What's the lesson to be to-day?

Mr. H.

The jam tart, if you please, miss; which is to say the puff, also, *and* the maid of honour; time permittin'. [*Mr. Honeyman proceeds to give Frances her cookery lesson.*]

[*A gay whistling is heard. Tony and the Beggarman are seen to cross the window, and then appear at the door. Tony is thickly muffled up, in leggings, fur cap, etc., and carries a faggot of wood, a rook rifle, and a dead rook. The Beggarman is gaunt and elongated, with hair like an ancient thatch. He blinks like a cat, looks as hungry as a hawk, and carries a stick cut from a wayside hedge, and a penny whistle.*]

Tony.

Morning, Mr. Budge; morning, Mr. Honeyman. I've brought a gentleman friend, Sallie, for a mug of cider. Helped me collar this game. Two more friends in the wood. Won't come in; shy. [*He throws down the faggot by the fire; hangs*

the rook on a beam; and goes out to fetch a jug of cider with which he returns. Mugs are passed round.]

Mr. B. [*to Beggarman*].

Travellin'?

Beggarman [*in chaunting nasal voice*].

> Here to-day and gone to-morrow;
> Nowt to buy with, nowt to borrow;
> Come the nightshine, packs down all;
> Ring poor Robin's funeral.

Co-old mumpin' on a last week's crust. [*To Candlestick-maker.*] You on the mump? [*Candlestick-maker nods. The merry company sip and talk. Mr. Budge rises.*]

Mr. B. [*to Sallie*].

What I'd make bold to say, miss, seein' as how music's pervided, all being friendly-like together, sun climbing high, and Christmas wearing near, mebbe this gennulman would oblige the company with a song.

All.

A song! A song! [*The Beggarman goes to the door, and, thrusting his head out of it, pipes a note or two on his whistle.*]

Beg. [*to Sallie, in a slow hoarse voice*].

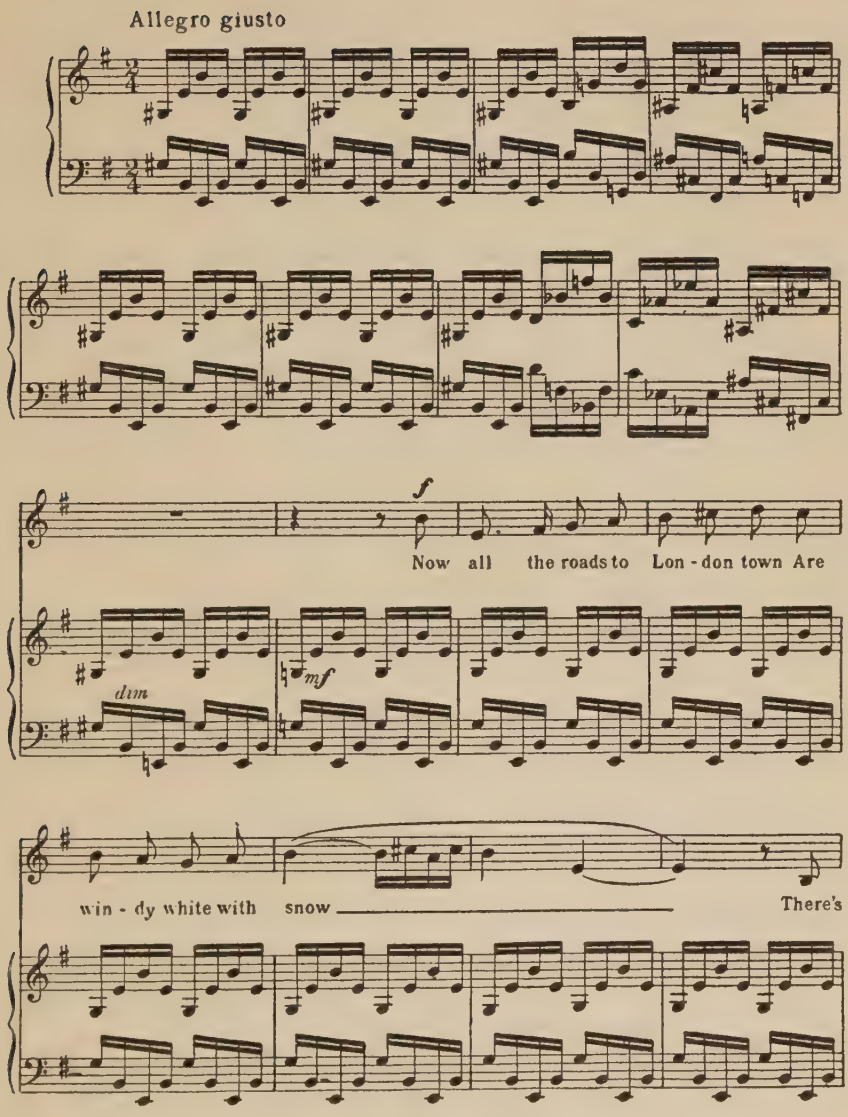
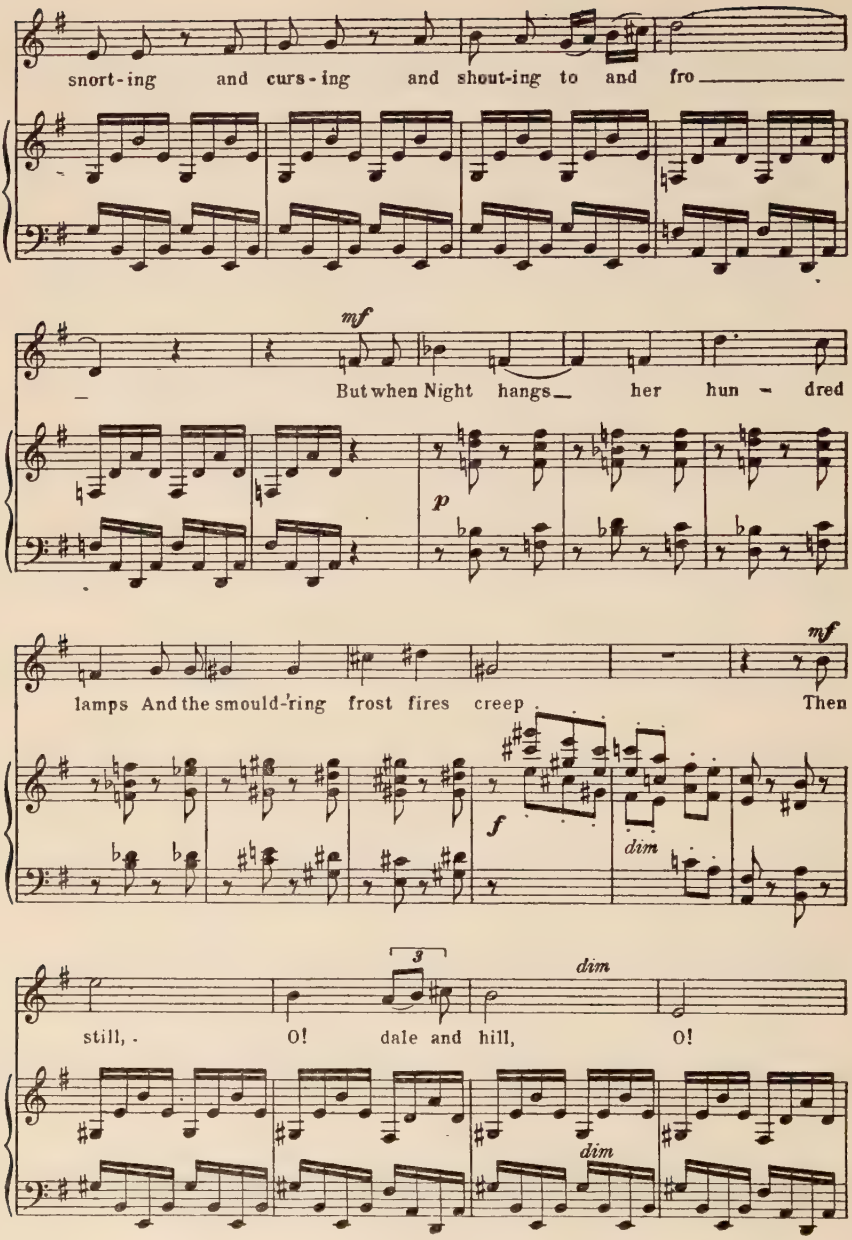
Me friends is a little fly, leddy; what you wouldn't call company-folk. But give 'em the key, they yawps like nightingales.

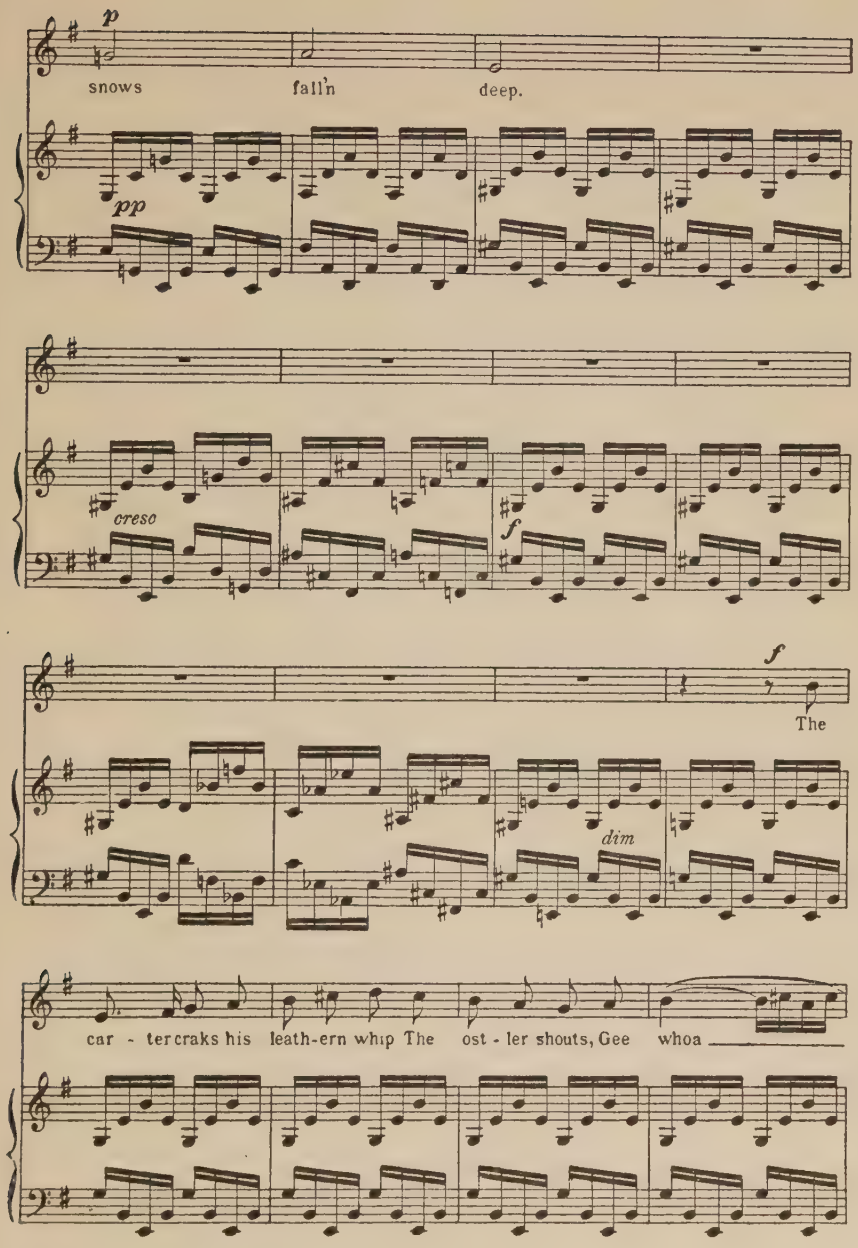
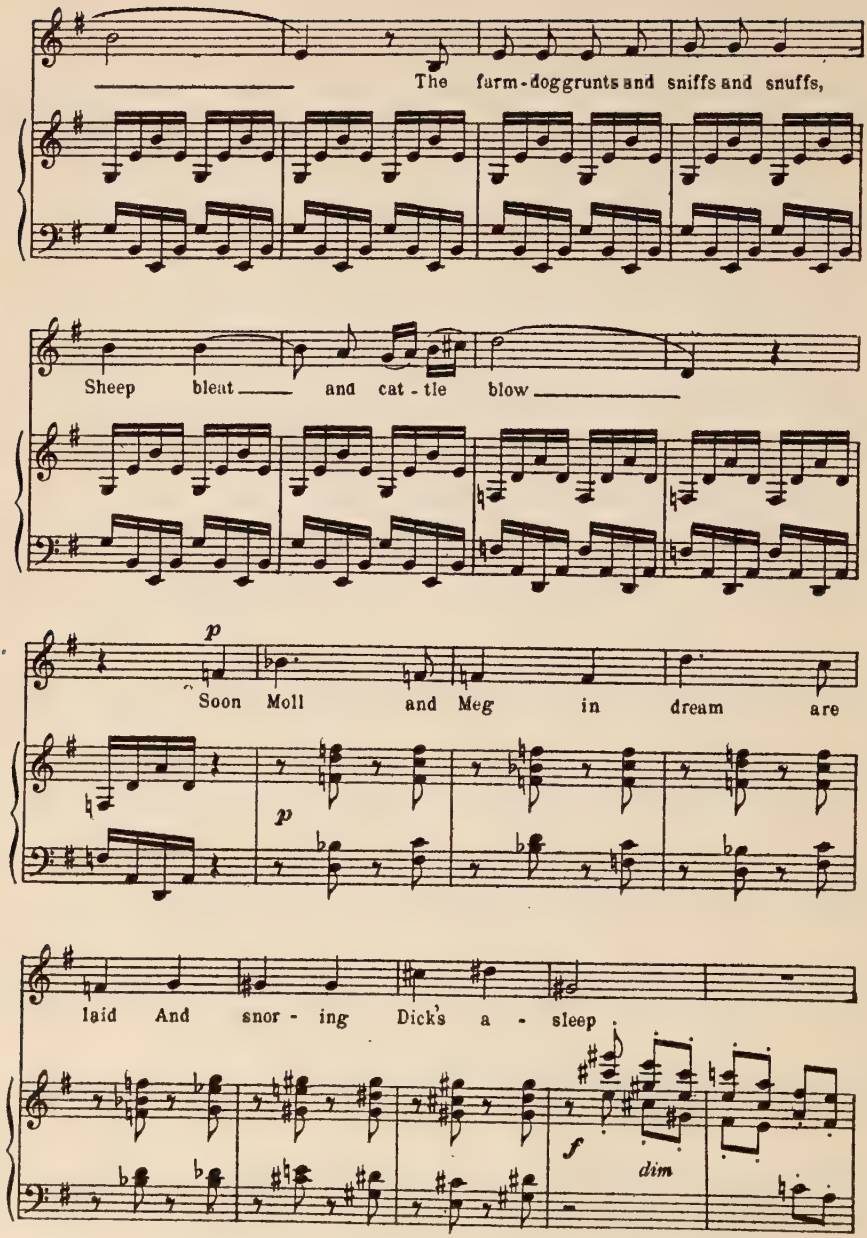
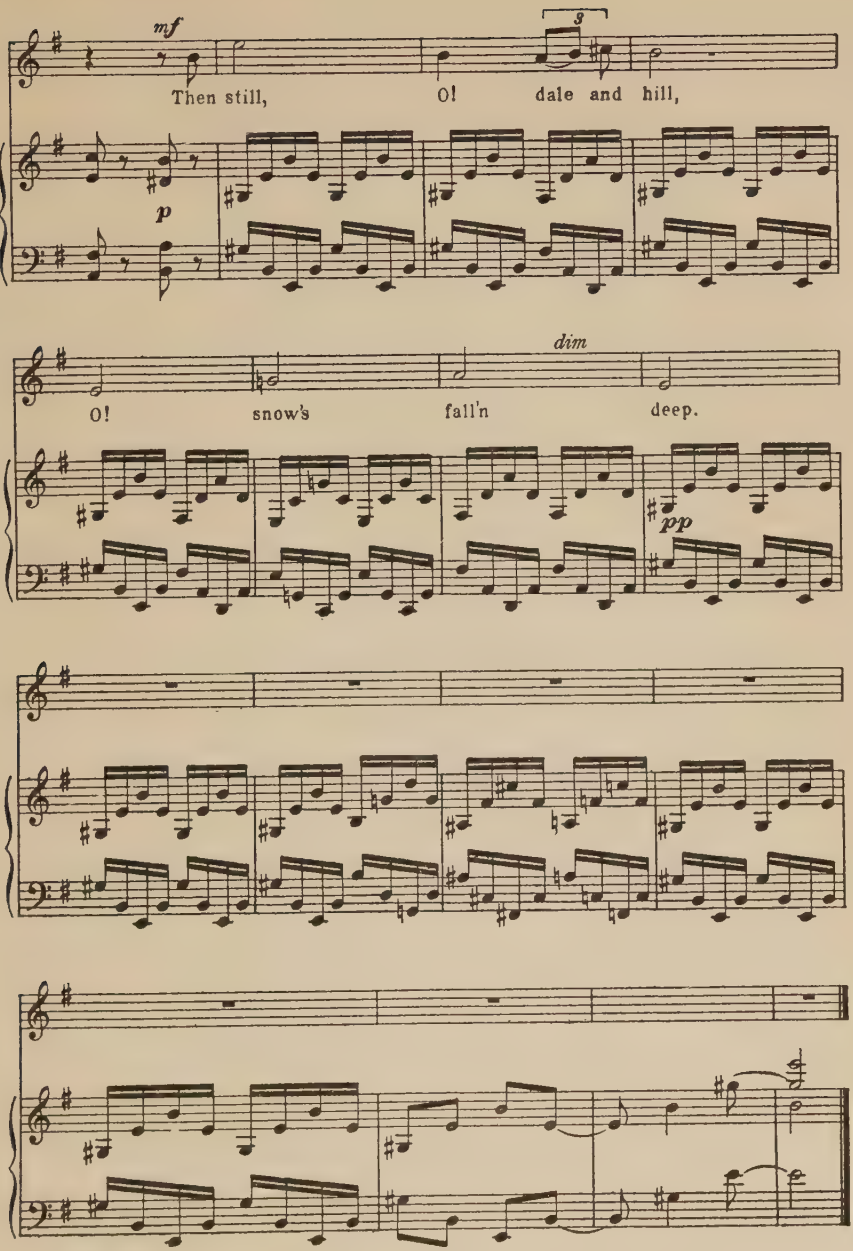
Mr. B.

[*He sings.*]

Beggar's Song.

C. ARMSTRONG GIBBS.



snort-ing and curs-ing and shout-ing to and fro
mf
But when Night hangs her hun - dred
p
mf
lamps And the smould-'ring frost fires creep Then
f
dim
3
dim
still, O! dale and hill, O!
dim

p
snows
fall'n
deep.
pp
creso
f
f
The
dim
car - ter cracks his leath-ern whip The ost - ler shouts, Gee whoa

The farm-dog grunts and sniffs and snuffs,
Sheep bleat and cat - tle blow
p
Soon Moll and Meg in dream are
p
laid And snor - ing Dick's a - sleep
f
dim

mf
3
Then still, O! dale and hill,
p
dim
O! snow's fall'n deep.
pp

Now all the roads to London Town
Are windy-white with snow;
There's shouting and cursing,
And snortings to and fro;
But when night hangs her hundred lamps,
And the snickering frost-fires creep,
Then still, O; dale and hill, O;
Snow's fall'n deep.

Distant Chorus from without:—

Then still, O; dale and hill, O;
Snow's fall'n deep.

The carter cracks his leathery whip;
The ostler shouts gee-whoa;
The farm dog grunts and sniffs and snuffs;
Bleat sheep; and cattle blow;
Soon Moll and Nan in dream are laid,
And snoring Dick's asleep;
Then still, O; dale and hill, O;
Snow's fall'n deep.

Distant Chorus from without:—

Then still, O; dale and hill, O;
Snow's fall'n deep.

A good song; a rare good song; and as neat a brace of nightingales as ever I heard. Shy, but tunesome. I warrant the sound on't trilled the air for miles around.

Mr. H. [*dreamily*].

A rare song, a powerful song. And that pipe, too; somethin' i' the natur' of a flage'let, I take it. Mrs. Honeyman's uncle Israel, now, rest his soul, was a sore spry performer on the French horn. [*To Mr. Budge.*] Do 'ee think, Mr. Budge, the company might be cheered by "Fol-dol-do"? [*To Sallie.*] There be grand makers of music in these parts, miss.

[*He hums the air. To Beggarman.*] P'r'aps, sir, you would lift your voice in the topmost line; and you, sire—[*To Candlestick-maker*]—might make a commitment of the second. Mr. Budge trills a rare rich tenor; and me full bass. Now then: one, two, three, four—and all together!

Fol, dol, do, and a south wind a-blowing O,
Fol, dol, do, and green growths a-growing O,
Fol, dol, do, and the heart inside me knowing O,
'Tis merry merry month of May.

Fol, dol, do, shrill chanticleer's a-crowing O,
Fol, dol, do, and the mower's soon a-mowing O,
O lovelier than the lilac tree, my lovely love's
a-showing O,
In merry merry month of May.

[*Loud applause.*]

Mr. B. [*to Sallie*].

An old catch, that; and a favourite in Little Crossings these hundred years gone. Time and tide, miss. But never was mornin' wasted sweeter. A very good day to 'ee, and good-day all.

[*Tony, having filled the Beggarman's pockets with loaves, pies, a bone of sirloin, a cold chicken, etc., follows him out.*]

Frances [*to Ann*].

Come along, Mummikins!

Ann [*to Mr. Honeyman*].

Frances and Ann going for a walk, Mr. Honeybee, in the woods. See Jack Frosts, I do; in long cloaks like Candlestick-men; and hats ever so high.

Mr. H. [*stooping and smoothing her hair with his long bony fingers*].

You don't say so, missie. Sharp eyes, missie. Not but

what there be queer comings and goings in Crossings Woods; as I've heard tell. [*To Sallie, nodding his head towards Frances.*] She'm that light and nimble with her fingers! [*Frances and Ann go out.*] Good-day, miss, and joy to your party! 'Twere a dark life that showed nought but shadows. And you'll take a look at the book, miss? Less purse-proud young leddy I never saw. [*He goes out.*]

Sallie [*sighs; then turns and feigns surprise at seeing the Candlestick-maker*].

Oh, Mr. Candlestick-maker; *what* a wasted morning!

C.-M.

Wasted? Why wasted?

Sallie.

Nothing, nothing done. [*She begins to peel potatoes, he to polish a copper pan.*] And yet, Mr. Candlestick-maker, we are not, you know, being torpid. That's what his house-master said Tony was: torpid. There's Tony now. I think he learns more in one day in the woods than he did a whole term at school. Even in *that* queer company. Yesterday afternoon he came home—just green; and was, oh, so ill. He had been smoking a clay pipe—shag he called it. And he vowed he wouldn't smoke again until—until he could *without* being ill. And what Tony vows to *himself,* Mr. Candlestick-maker, he sticks to. If only he would vow to be not bottom of his form, but just next to bottom, next term! You learn much quicker by experience, don't you? *Now* I know that butchers have hearts which they don't hang up on hooks in their shops. Now I know that one gets cross when one's tired, and not merely because of aunts—or nieces—and things. Now I know that whatever happens, the country is always here, *here:* and the sunshine and the woods, and the light, and the music of it all.

What kind of life was yours, Mr. Candlestick-maker, when you were young? I mean, younger?

C.-M.

Just going round with the world; up hill, down dale.

Sallie.

These Crossings Woods, Mr. Candlestick-maker, I sometimes think they come into the house. All day the dry twigs are whispering, and the wind is full of voices. And sometimes in the dead of night, I waken as if a bell had just ceased ringing. I listen; and it is as if I heard little pattering footsteps, and high crickety voices in the garden.

C.-M.

Night's full of strangeness; and there's a pretty wide hem between wake and dream.

Sallie.

Yes, Mr. Candlestick-maker. Now *Ann* is a strange child. She will sit for hours quite alone, in these little old rooms. I have come in, and it is as if she had just stopped talking to some one. There couldn't be a ghost that could talk to the child, could there? I'm not afraid, only a little trembly and excited; and now that it is nearly full-moon-time, one lies awake, as if one were leagues and leagues under the sea. Is *that* like sleeping in the woods?

C.-M.

Yes; but a bigger bed, and many candles; and the sigh of the whole world turning in its sleep.

Sallie.

And do you lie on your back and see the stars rocking in the trees, the Chair, the Pleiads, and Charley's Wain? Do they stretch far, Crossings Woods?

C.-M.

Miles on miles—to the world's end.

Sallie.

And nothing stirring? Only the little night-beasts, and—and the nightingales? Is their song *very* sorrowful in the summer time, Mr. Candlestick-maker? As sorrowful, I mean, as the poems say?

C.-M.

Well, it is what you might call compounded. Now you would think he would crack his little skull for joy; and now he will wail like a churchyard of widows. As for "nothing stirring," there are strange busyings in Crossings Woods some moonlight nights.

[*A small strange countenance peeps in at the window.*]

Sallie.

Here? *These* woods?

C.-M.

Stirrings, whisperings, trumpetings, a shaking of leaves; lights gleaming and scattering; more than *I* could make candlesticks for. In these parts, they say, every century a Revelling of the Silent is held, and a Queen crowned. They are like the bees. They flock from all countries of the world, Kamchatka to Peru. It is the Queen's region, Crossings Woods.

[*An unearthly minglement of light and shade, as if the sun were in eclipse, dims into the day. The fire begins to roar.*]

Sallie.

You don't mean, Mr. Candlestick-maker—the Little People?

Mr. William Honeyman
D.P.L

[*An outlandish whining voice is heard droning. Sallie draws herself in like a snail. The Candlestick-maker stands with a peculiar smile on his face.*]

Fairy [*without*].

Of your 'nevolent nature
Spare a crust for a creature.
A drink and a dole,
For a ho-omeless soul.

Sallie [*strangely moved, and speaking as if by rote*].

What voice is that? I heard it in dream—somewhere, somewhere. Surely, stranger, is it not in one's own mind?

Fairy [*without*].

Of slumber but tossings—
White the rime in bare Crossings;
Cold is shed, barn and byre, leddy,
A coal from your fire, leddy!

[*A Fairy appears, disguised, hooded and hatted fantastically as a pedlar; with a crutch, and a tray of ribbons, knickknackery, etc.*]

Fairy [*speaking as if in a language not her own*].

Day's greetings, Mammazella; day's greetings. And to thee, Wanderer. [*She throws up her hands in salutation, and looks at him shrewdly from under her hood.*]

Sallie [*timidly*].

Greetings; greetings. You are hungry? [*She offers a platter of bread.*] Cold? Please seat yourself at the fire.

Fairy [*refusing the food*].

Nay, not for eating.

Sallie.

Thirsty? [*She offers the Fairy cider in a little mug.*]

[*The Fairy takes the mug and flicks a few drops from it on stepstone and lintel, muttering.*]

Fairy.

Ala-i-aba meeren haicht! Stars light your dark eyes, Mammazella; frost rose your cheeks, Mammazella; birds' tongues of April be in your mouth, Mammazella; and sea foam to your fingers. A weesome, lusome, flaxen childerkin dwells here?

Sallie [*to Candlestick-maker*].

She means Ann?

[*The Candlestick-maker keeps his eyes fixed on the Fairy, who peers this way and that, rocking her body to and fro the while with a slow rhythmic motion.*]

Fairy.

Nay, lady. I ask but to make known, Mammazella, there's many a pretty bauble here for your choosing—many a pretty bauble.

Sallie.

How much are they?

Fairy.

Nought but a wee small handful of her pretty hair-locks, Mammazella. *Nau gha bali*—enough to keep a jenny-wren snug?

Sallie.

But my sister is not here: and what do you want them for?

Fairy [*mumbling*].

Ah Mammazella, a bargain's a bargain; a gift a gift. *Queens must be crowned.* Ribands, shoe-ties, pretty laces?—

And O, sleepy odours,
The bosom to lull;
When the swart raven yells,
And the taper burns dull.

Sallie.

Mr. Candlestick-maker! She frightens me.

C.-M. [*to the fairy*].

The lady says the child is not within. I cross my thumbs. [*He spreads out his hands, their thumbs crossed, high and menacingly above his head.*]

Fairy [*whines*].

Ay, my good gentleman: *but where go the children, there go we; mischief none to them that wish us well.* [*She casts him a prolonged, searching glance and, muttering, turns away; but thrusts suddenly her head in at the doorway again, and cries incantation or imprecation upon them. On her going the sunlight brightens into the kitchen once more.*]

Sallie [*swiftly returning to herself*].

Poor, poor old thing. I can't let her go like that. [*She hastens out, calling.*] Pedlar, Pedlar!

[*A whistling is heard, and Tony enters.*]

Tony.

I say, who's the old woman? A mighty quick walker! [*Sallie returns, her left hand on her breast.*]

Sallie [*breathlessly*].

She refused everything except a ha'penny with a hole in it. And she gave me this. A frost-flower, like those in Ann's little bunch. [*The Candlestick-maker crosses over to the doorway and stares uneasily out over the snow.*]

C.-M.

Well; she is out of our sight. And I too must be gone.

There are few paths in Crossings Woods when snow comes down. I would keep the little maid, maybe, at home after dusk.

Sallie [*wistfully*].

And you'll not be coming again, Mr. Candlestick-maker? You'll not . . . Do you by any chance make copper candle *snow*-lanthorns, Mr. Candlestick-maker? And would you make one for me?

C.-M.

Ay. [*Musingly gazing at her.*] Any light that lightens the way. 'Tis a long journey for all. I'll come again. [*He goes out. Sallie watches him awhile, then comes in. Tony has begun to chop up wood for kindling.*]

Tony.

Queer fellow that, Sallie.

Sallie [*not hearing him as she broodingly sings to herself*].

"And the taper burns low." Tony!

Tony.

Yes, Sallie.

Sallie.

My dear, if you *should* be going out in the dead of night again, would you just tap, as you pass, at my door? I heard your footsteps; and I listened and listened, and there were the frosty stars blazing, and I thought, you know—why, that you must be a ghostilegs!

Tony.

Did you, Sallie? I'm sorry. The snow. I only went trapping.

Sallie.

I suppose your—your gentleman-friends are only *resting* in

the woods. They eat a good deal, Tony; and perhaps Aunt—Aunt Bayswater . . . *you* know.

Tony [*impulsively*].

They're all right, Sallie. I keep them at arm's length.

Sallie [*kissing him*].

Yes, my dear; and I'm glad it's a friendly arm. Oh, how I love it all: just being myself; just opening my eyes in the quietness; just breathing. Still, it's a little lonely and anxious sometimes; not a word from father. And these—Strangers. You are the man of the house, Tony; and such a comfort.

Tony.

Trust me, Sallie. [*Tactfully.*] That Candlestick-maker, now. He's a queer chap. What is his real job? I suppose *he* didn't jump out of a rotten potato?

Sallie [*shocked*].

My dear! He helped me peel all these. He's so practical.

Tony.

I'll keep my eye on him. What makes you anxious, Sallie?

Sallie.

Oh, Tony, the bills, the bills; and—

[*Frances and Ann come in, laden with holly and box.*]

Ann [*in burning excitement*].

Us met *such* a funny queer lady in the woods, Sallie. She did come and touch me with her fingers, and stroked my hair, and stooped at me like—like a nicicle. And we runned and runned. *Ann* wouldn't have runned. I liked that lady, I did.

Sallie [*sits down, deeply troubled*].

Oh, France, I'm thankful you ran away. She came here, too. She frightened me. And the Candlestick-maker says the woods

are dangerous—at night. That music, that singing, you know. And France. They were both very kind, Mr. Budge and Mr. Honeyman, I mean. But we must owe them pounds and pounds and pounds. I daren't even look in the books. And Mr. Budge says Aunt Susan paid absolutely everything sharp at full moon; it's nearly full moon *now*. [*She turns out a large leather housekeeper's purse.*] My dear! £2 15*s*. 5*d*.! It just means we are ruined. What *shall* I do? And the party, too.

Ann [*sliding up and patting Sallie's hand*].

Nann not hungry, Sallie. Cheer up, Miss Sallikins.

Frances.

"Do," Sallie? Why, that's quite simple. We must make a clean breast of it, I suppose. Just *dis*-order everything, and —and fast. I did feel a little bilious this morning, too. *I*'ll cook the cookery for the party. And Tony shall make the ginger beer. Let's write now.

Tony.

I say: that's a bit of Humble Pie, isn't it?

Frances [*hotly*].

I'd sooner eat Humble Pie than Proud Pudding, any day: at least *here*.

[*They gather round the table, Sallie in the middle, Tony sprawling on one side of her, Frances on the other. Ann, with a scrap of paper and a large pencil, draws up a small chair in front of the table and kneels down beside it.*]

Frances [*writing*].

My dear Mr. Budge,—The Miss Wildershams send their compliments and regrets and beg that the turkeys and the ducks and the chickens . . . and the . . .

[*A Fairy peeps in at the door; a Fairy peers in at the window.*]

Ann.

Nann'll write *Fairies,* Nann will. Poor Sallie! . . . Fairy money!

CURTAIN

Act Four

Humans and Inhumans

Act Four

Humans and Inhumans

Time: 4 o'clock and winter twilight: the Twenty-third of December. Scene: The outskirts of Little Crossings Woods deep in snow. A gabled angle of Crossings is seen in the distance, with lattice windows under its overhanging eaves. Icily still, clotted with snow, the trees of garden and woods brood over the scene. In the foreground stands a rounded hut (such as may be seen encircling the North Pole). A fire burns fiercely in a bucket, set up, night-watchman fashion, on two bricks.

[*Sallie sits darning in a garden chair beside a rough-wood table on which tea-things are spread. An immense basketful of stockings lies beside her in the snow. She is so muffled up in a gaudy-coloured shawl and scarves that her*

small dark face is hardly visible. Frances is stooping low over the fire, reading by its flamelight a novelette.]

Sallie [*solemnly peering over her needle*].

Tell me, immortal sister, do *grave*-diggers work at Christmas?

Frances [*absently*].

Grave-diggers, Sallie?

Sallie.

Because, my dear, if this kind of thing goes on, we shall be frozen stiff by then—and extremely awkward and brittle to handle.

Frances [*mumbling*].

I don't care what happens to my old body when I'm out of it. It will have to do its job first, though. [*She wakes out of her reading for an instant.*] I'm going to be absolutely free —*without* being detestable. [*She relapses once more into her novelette.*]

Sallie.

"Don't care," France, wasn't iced to death; he was stewed till he was done. I should enjoy a little gentle simmering myself just now. My extremities, as Aunt Bayswater used to say, have simply stopped being alive. [*She softly stamps her feet in the snow.*] This Esquimau tea of Tony's is a perfectly crazy idea. But what an angel he has been these last few days!

Frances [*mumbling*].

Tony wants to sleep out.

Sallie.

Sleep out!

Frances.

In that. [*She nods towards the snow-hut.*] He says our breaths would keep us warm.

Sallie [*flinging down her darning and thrusting more sticks on the fire*].

Oh, France, France, if it weren't for those hideous bills, and the Party, and—and—[*she looks covertly about her in the deepening wintry gloom*] and that! We have made a frightful muddle of everything. I saw Mr. Budge *look* at Mr. Honeyman.

Frances.

The truth is, you Old-Head-on-Young-Shoulders, you just worry. What's the good? Why not let things be what you want them to be until—well, they come different?

Sallie.

But you see, France, it's Aunt Susan. She trusted us. It was a kind of faith. I see it now. And when you go finding out—in your grave too—that it's no good hoping that people will do what they won't do, not even *when* you are in your grave—why . . .

[*Emily comes scurrying along from the house. She is a flaxen, solemn child, with narrow shoulders and skimpy yellow hair, and might be the Mad Hatter's small sister. She is carrying a large earthenware jam-jar tied up with a ribbon in a frill of vermilion paper.*]

Sallie [*admiring the jam-jar*].

How extremely artistic, Emily! [*She peeps in, and tastes its contents with a wooden spoon.*] And strawberry!

Emily.

'Ess, miss; thank 'ee, miss. That's how me Aunt Tupper does the geranimums. And please, miss, if you'll excuse me,

there might be a drop or two of blood on the bread and butter. I've cut me thumb. [*She holds it aloft in its bandage against the wintry sky.*]

Sallie.

Oh Emily, not deep?

Emily.

To the werry bone. But it's doin' quite nicely, thank 'ee, miss; and I left the kettle boiling over, so tea won't be no time. [*She scuttles off towards the house.*]

[*A jangling of bells is heard, and Tony comes in from the right in a pair of old top boots and a fur coat inside out, with his rook-rifle over his shoulder and a cowboy's whip. He is leading the Budges' bobtail, harnessed to a sled, from out of a shapeless bundle in which presently emerges Ann's fair head.*]

Tony.

Whoa there, Jugga. Hang on, Nann.

Sallie [*lifting Ann out*].

Not cold? Not shivery-shaky all down the spinicums, Mummikins? Quite, quite sure?

Ann.

I'm in a *oven,* Sallie—and we spilled out into the snow—and Jugga barked—and Tony barked—and the wood barked—and there! What did Tony and Nann *seed!* Two little buzzin' Steeple-hats, like posts in the snow—starin', starin' at Nann between the trees. And Tony runned—and Jugga runned—and the trees runned—and here we is! And please, Sallie dear, may I have my tea in the Snow House?

Tony.

Come on, Nann; crawl in. The snow's like glass, France.

[*Scornfully.*] Reading *that* stuff, you old Snail! Stick a needle into her, Sallie.

Ann [*from inside the snow-hut*].

Stick a neegle into her, Sallie.

Frances [*mumbling absently*].

All ri', Tony, juzz end of chapter . . .

Sallie [*anxiously*].

Did *you* see the Steeple-hats, Tony?

[*Before he can answer, Emily scurries in again with a huge kitchen tea-pot in one hand and an iron black kettle to match in the other. She is followed by Mrs. Budge, a hummocky little woman with a large bright face, who is carrying, baby-fashion, a newspaper parcel containing a leg of mutton, its woolly shank dangling down outside.*]

Emily.

If you please, miss, Mrs. Budge have called.

Sallie.

There, France! It's all over! [*To Mrs. Budge.*] I *am* glad to see you, Mrs. Budge. Please sit down, and make yourself very, very comfortable. The children—that is *we*—are having an Esquimau tea. I hope you won't feel the cold?

Mrs. B. [*doubtfully*].

Dear no, miss; not if it won't be what might be called a *lingering* meal. I was coming across the fields, *Crossings* way, miss; so I've brought 'ee to-morrow's jint—to see in the turkey, like. Hung to a nicety, says Mr. Budge, and just ripe for eatin'.

Sallie [*removing the paper*].

What a beauty, Mrs. Budge! And the fur! They don't grow legs like that in London. It's the handsomest I've ever

seen. [*She puts the leg on an empty chair, and stoops over it as if to collect her thoughts.*] You know, Mrs. Budge, it's *very* curious that you should come at this moment. My sister and I were just talking of the—of the——

Mrs. B. [*rapidly interrupting her*].

That's one thing, miss. And the next be Mr. Budge. He sends his respex for your kind letter and which he'll answer himself, business bein' business, in doo course, he says. But first he's wishful to thank 'ee for that 'mazin' little bottle of lineament you sent him for his poor lumbago, him in the draughty shop all weathers and all. And there, miss, you'd hardly be believin' it, but pain went moment of usin', havin' flown straight to the throat, and so *out,* please God! And Lor' [*pausing to take breath, and gazing about her*], Lor', what a fine house the young gennleman's built hisself! We haven't seen such a winter in Little Crossings, miss, since Mr. Budge broke his chopper on a bullock's heart.

Sallie [*absently*].

Really! [*Attentively.*] Really! . . . But what I was going to say, Mrs. Budge, is——

Mrs. B. [*rapidly intervening once more*].

As for Jew in Little Crossings, Mr. B. says, or shadder of Jew, he says, why——

Emily [*rushing in, in almost speechless excitement*].

If you please, miss, the Vicarage leddy, miss; Miss Welcome, miss, and Miss Josephine.

Sallie.

Who, Emily? France! Miss Welcome! What did she say, Emily?

Emily.

She says, says she, "Is Miss Widdershams at home?" And I says, says I, " 'Ess, miss, home she be. Step in, miss," miss, I says, and in she steps.

Sallie.

Good gracious, France, what *shall* we do?

[*Tony leaps into the sled and burrows under the rugs. Sallie hastens a few steps towards the house; but too late. Her visitors are seen approaching:—Miss Julia Welcome, a lady in the height of middle age, square, sagacious, inimitably imperturbable, with a rather masculine voice and manner; and Josephine, her niece, a handsome, spirited girl of about sixteen with red hair.*]

Miss W. [*richly enjoying the scene*].

So here we are. A winter picnic. Most seasonable. How do you do, Miss Wildersham? This is my niece, Josephine.

[*Ann slowly thrusts her head out of the snow-house, tortoise-fashion, and instantly bobs back again.*]

Sallie [*shy, but undaunted*].

How do you do, Miss Welcome? It *is* kind of you to come. This is my sister, Frances. And that—that's Tony. [*Tony emerges.*] We are having an—an Esquimau tea, in the snow, you know. I do hope you won't think the weather is unpro—unpro—not quite warm enough. This is Mrs. Budge, a *very* old friend of ours.

Miss W.

Ah! and an old friend of mine, too. How do you do, Mrs. Budge?

Mrs. B.

Nicely, ma'am, thank'ee.

Miss W.

An Esquimau tea. An excellent idea—what do *you* think, Josephine?

[*She sits down on the chair containing the leg of mutton, which Sallie deftly removes in the nick of time, and replaces on another chair.*]

Josephine.

Rather, Aunt Julie! Heavenly! [*To Frances.*] What a stunning fire! And a sledge!

[*They begin to talk and laugh together in the flamelight; Tony, suddenly conscious apparently of his boots, gazes at Josephine, and looks foolish; Sallie swathes up Miss Welcome in a rug, and proceeds to pour out tea.*]

Miss W. [*tucking herself in*].

There; snugness itself, Miss Wildersham. A respirator and some of that delicious toast and we're perfect. What is death in a good cause, Mrs. Budge? Ah, here is the Vicar!

[*Mr. Welcome—very black against the snow—is led out by Emily. He is lean, gold-spectacled, clean-shaven, and stoops a little.*]

Miss W.

Here we are, Jeremy; an Esquimau tea. This is Miss Wildersham.

Mr. W. [*takes Sallie's hands*].

So this is Miss Wildersham—this is Miss Sallie. Delightful! Splendid! And scrums, what a fire! Ah, Mrs. Budge, there you are; keeping a sharp look out on your ten toes, I see. [*To Sallie.*] Five and thirty years ago, my dear—antiquity that I am—on this very spot I made her first snow-man for your dear mother. Alas! he thawed. [*Turning to Frances.*] And this is—?

Sallie.

Frances. And Tony.

Miss W.

Come, Jeremy, sit down and dare the elements.

Mr. W. [*musingly—glancing about him*].

Now tell me, O nieces and nephews of an adorable aunt, how are we swimming along? How are we managing? Bless my heart, Julia, how Susan would have enjoyed this! And by gum, as Mr. Plush used to say, what a world! [*To Sallie.*] Confide in me, my dear: I have been young and now—am younger. Are we *happy?*—just inconsumably, incomprehensibly happy?—like that old fire there in the bucket [*mumbling*] that will soon be ashes.

Sallie [*glancing out into the woods*].

We are living, and learning, Mr. Welcome; we are indeed, and all the time. And *Crossings!* and the country! Happy? —we are as happy as the days are—

Miss W.

Short, my dear. Short and few, I expect: if bronchitis has anything to say to it.

Sallie.

That's *just* what I was saying to Frances. And yet—I sometimes wonder, you know, Miss Welcome, if people would ever be ill at all if there weren't so many things to be ill *of*. It's the names that—that set one off.

Mr. W.

Bravo, my dear. The names; the names. Never say die till you call in the doctor. Now if I walked by faith and not by sight, I should just wriggle into that snow-house and be roast blubber ever after.

[*Tony cracks his whip.*]

Miss W.

Josephine, my dear! Be careful. Jeremy, warn the child!

Mr. W.

Yoicks, tally-ho; and off we go, over the snow, and—hang on, Joe!

[*Tony whisks Josephine off on the sledge at a gallop; and at this moment Emily once more scuttles in, a loaf in one hand and a tin of biscuits in the other, calling out as she runs.*]

Emily.

Oh, miss! Oh, miss! Me Lady Minch, miss; and mother, miss. I've asked 'em *out.*

[*Silence: in which Lady Minch presently appears out of the distance; little, peering, testy, in all tints of purple. She is followed by Mrs. Honeyman, black and gaunt, in her best bugled bonnet and shawl.*]

Miss W. [*chuckling and aside to Mr. Welcome*].

Louisa, Jeremy! [*To Sallie.*] What my brother calls, naughty man, a holy terror. [*To Lady Minch.*] Ah, Louisa! You see you have caught us "on the spree." An Esquimau tea. Sit down, Louisa, and return to our youth.

Lady M.

What's that? Foolish young person brought me out—here! Burst pipes?

Mr. W.

Greenland; Lapland, Louisa; do as Lapland does.

Lady M. [*peering at Sallie*].

What's that there? What do ye call that—a squaw?

Miss W.

A squaw, Louisa! This is Miss Wildersham—dear Susan's niece.

Lady M. [*blinking closely*].

H'm! How do you do? [*Mr. Welcome leads her towards the table.*]

Mr. W.

Now then, rugs, blankets, quilts, hot-water bottles!

Emily.

Hot-water bottles, sir; 'ess, sir. [*To Mrs. Honeyman.*] Sit down, Mother; there may be more a-comin'? [*She clutters off through the snow.*]

Lady M.

Are you crazy, Julia? Tea here! Preposterous!

Mr. W.

High tea, Louisa. Penguin pie, bear sandwiches, walrus broth?

[*After heated objections Lady Minch is at last persuaded to join the party and to sit down. She instantly rebounds, with a faint scream.*]

Mrs. B. [*extricating the joint*].

Only a leg o' mutton, me lady!

[*Lady Minch reseats herself and is soothed down and tucked up. Emily staggers in, laden with blankets and hot-water bottles.*]

Mr. W.

Come along, Emily; three bottle lady, two bottle gentleman. Ahoy there, more rugs!

Sallie.

There, Lady Minch. You must be quite, quite cosy.

Tony [*out of the distance*].

Rugs ahoy! [*He is seen with a lantern, ascending a ladder to an upper window.*]

Miss W.

There, Louisa, you are the belle of the ball.

Lady M. [*unappeased*].

Julia, you are demented. I'm perishing by inches.

Sallie [*as if inspired*].

Quick, France, the fairy wine! [*Bringing Mrs. Honeyman to the tea-table.*] Please sit down, Mrs. Honeyman. Sugar?

Mrs. H. [*in a sepulchral voice*].

Two and a tiddy, if you please, miss.

Mr. W.

Ah, Mrs. Honeyman; here we are then. Mad as hatters Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; March hares the rest of the week. And Sundays?—sufficient unto the day—and so the world wags.

Mrs. H.

Indeed it do, sir. Wags *and* wags.

Mr. W.

And how's your husband? I hope in better spirits?

Mrs. H.

I goes on *worrying,* sir; but I'm bound to say, not so low as he were. The young leddy very kindly give him a cordial—a cordial, sir, which have eased him more than all the doctor's physics—which he never could be forced to swallow—these ten years gone. He don't—er—*fumi*gate so. Which [*gloomily shaking her head*] ain't to say that the contrariwise hasn't its dangers. As I says to him, it's not them, Honeyman, as keeps a watchful eye on the dark side of things does all the squintin'. It's a dark world, sir.

now a fairy···ducketing and peering

Mr. W.

Ah, Mrs. Honeyman—black as my hat. But [*and he proves his assertion*] even that, you see, has a silver lining.

[*Beyond the outskirts of the snow-bound party appears now a fairy, in monstrous disguise, ducketing and peering out from behind a huddled thorn. It is full dark, and the moon casts lean black shadows across the fire-flushed snow. A trembling music stirs in the frosty twigs. The company chatters on. Frances brings in the fairy wine. Mr. Welcome accepts and sips a tiny gobletful.*]

Lady M. [*nursing, as best she can in her blankets, a huge kitchen cup and saucer and an immense slice of bread and butter*].

What did I always maintain, Julia? It's in the family. Drink you may eradicate; insanity never. . . . And who, pray, is that familiar person amusing the Vicar?

Miss W. [*tactfully talking her down*].

And how's little Jemima, Mrs. Budge?

Mrs. B.

Nicely, ma'am, thank'ee, except for her winter corf. She corfs the roof off.

Lady M. [*to Miss W.*].

What name? Fudge?

Miss W. [*whispering*].

Budge!

Lady M.

Budge!—the butcher!

Sallie [*hastily*].

Some fairy wine—do, Miss Welcome. It's wonderful stuff;

so comforting. [*The wine goes round, and the human voices rise higher, like rooks in an elm.*]

Mrs. H. [*to Mr. Welcome*].

What I says, sir, is "wanton kittens may make sober cats." Look at my Embly, now; you'd think she'd been born in a palace.

Miss W. [*To Sallie—unsteadily*].

Fairy wine, my dear!—molten lava would be nearer the mark. Come, dreamless Louisa, fairy wine.

Lady M. [*now thoroughly alarmed, and peering about her*].

What, Julia, where? Hairy kine? Cows!

Miss W. [*as if chaunting*].

Fairy wine, fairy wine, fairy wine.

Lady M.

T't! Demented! [*She hastily tosses off her potion.*] Fairy fiddlesticks!

[*A shrill, unearthly, bird-like cry echoes out of the woods. Lady Minch gently subsides, nods, pricks up, languishes, begins to drowse. The sledge returns festooned with Chinese lanterns. The children group themselves around the fire, silent and hearkening, their faces beautified in the conflicting lights.*]

Mr. W. [*inarticulately ecstatic*].

The air; the stars; space, Mrs. Honeyman. I hear the sound of revelry by night! What beings now are these . . . ?

Miss W. [*in a drowse*].

Jeremy, Jeremy, my dear. Take my hand . . .

Lady M. [*her voice sounding out of her, shrill and remote*].

Tell Sir Thomas . . . tell Sir Thomas . . . tell Sir Thomas.

[*Quavering.*] Why, it was years ago—years ago. [*Her voice shrills away.*]

[*Fairy II comes sidling into the further ring of fire commingled with star-light, with bird-like peering motions of head and shoulders. And softly, suddenly, as if the frozen quiet of the woods had concentrated into sound, breaks out the twangling music of strings—the Candlestick-maker's fiddle. Sallie springs like a fawn to her feet, then seats herself again, hiding her cheek from the flames. The little human concourse leadenly reclines, wrapped in unearthly peace.*]

Mr. W. [*lifting a helpless hand*].

Ah, ah! if music be the food of love, play on—play on . . . play on.

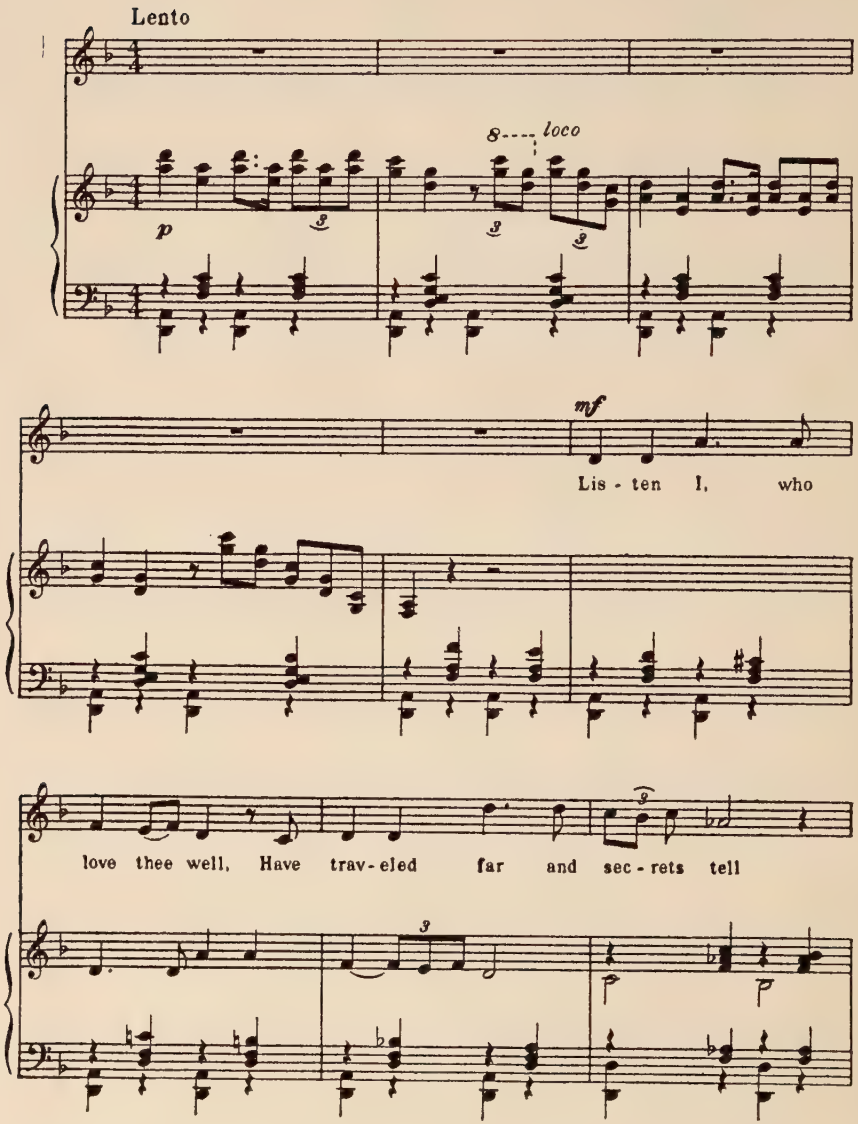
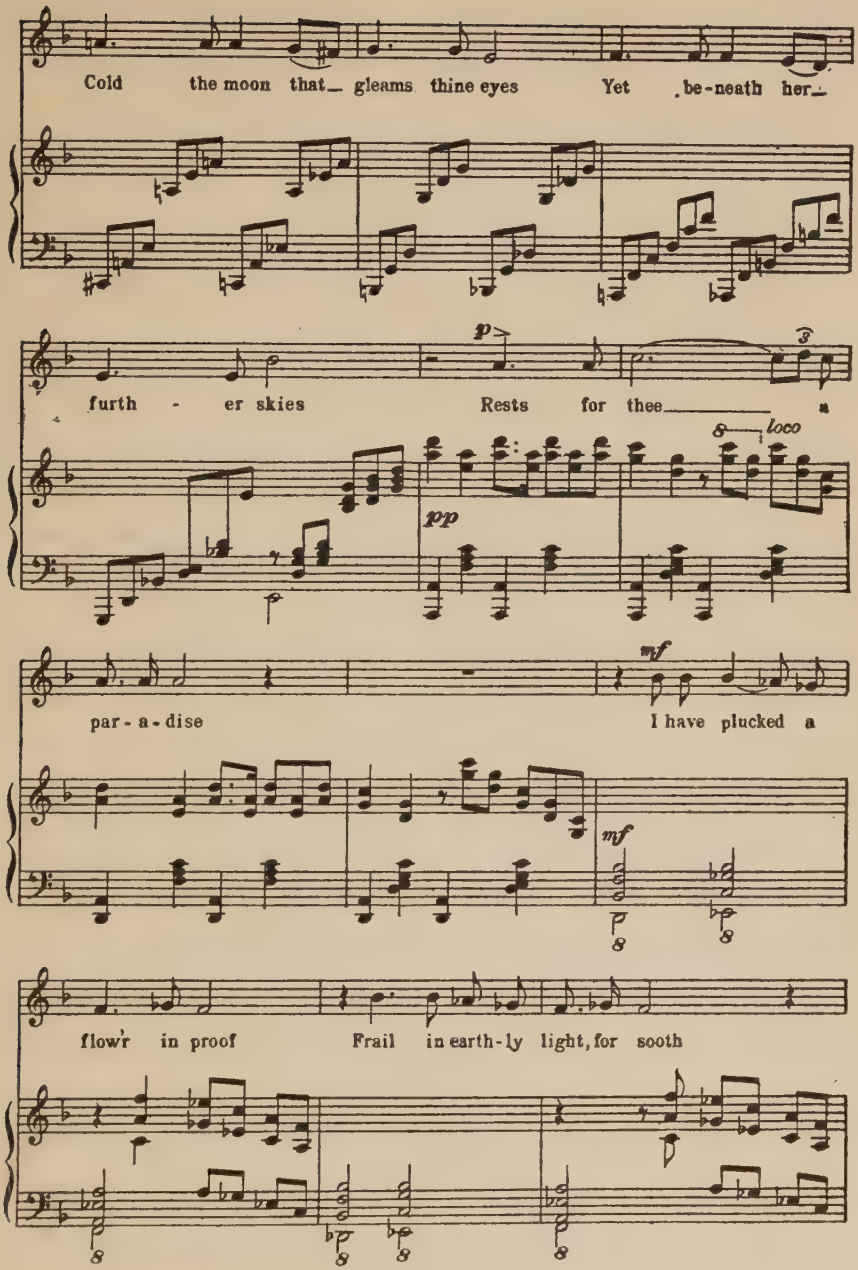
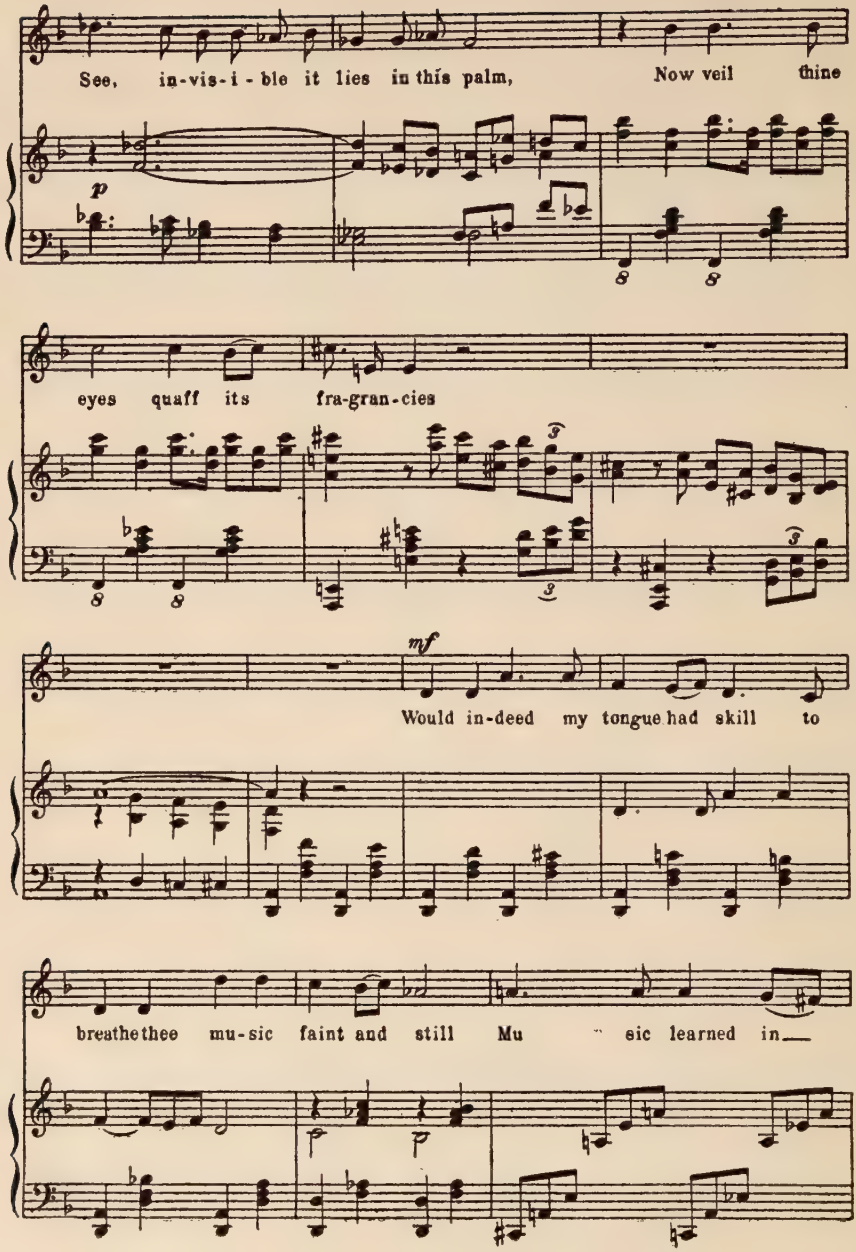
[*The Candlestick-maker sings.*]

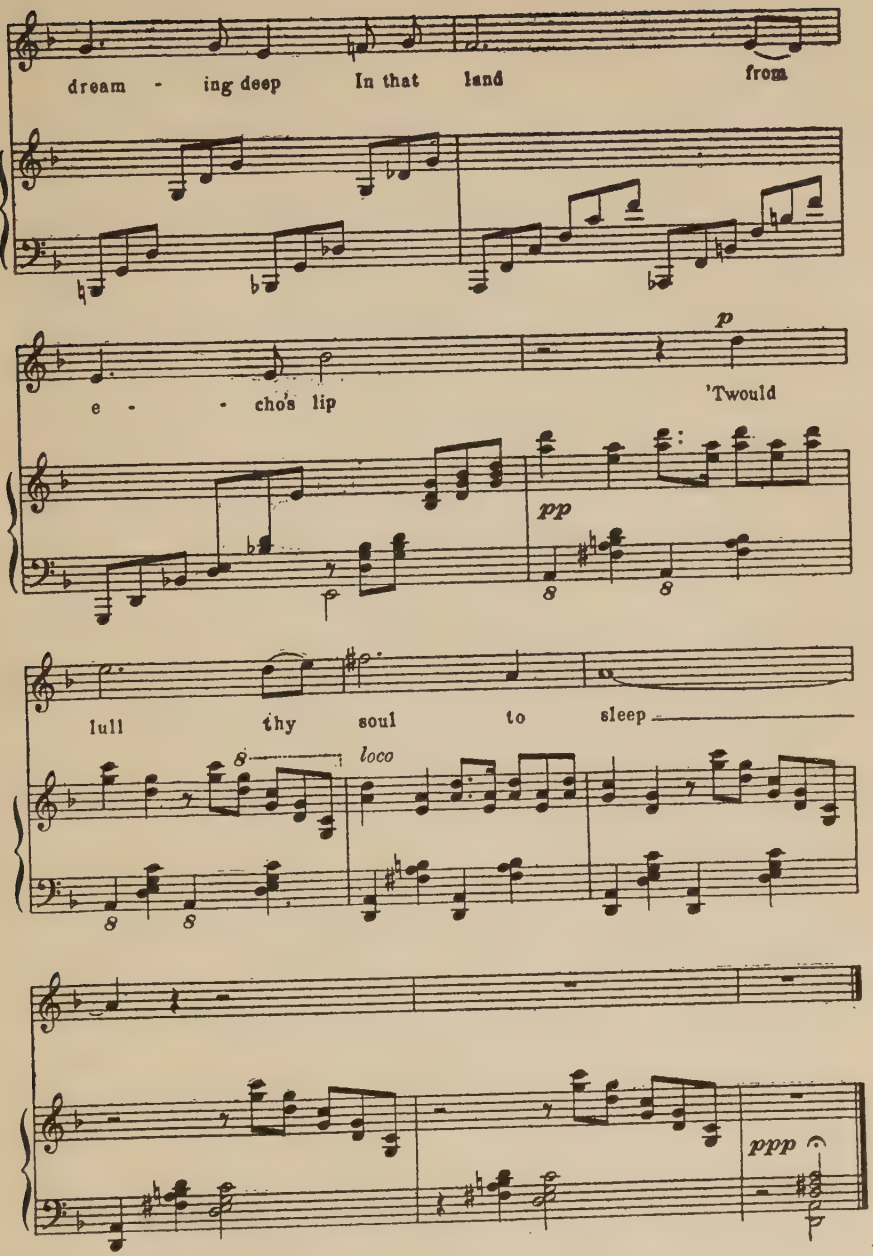
Listen, I who love thee well
Have travelled far, and secrets tell;
Cold the moon that gleams thine eyes,
Yet beneath her further skies
Rests, for thee, a paradise.

I have plucked a flower in proof,
Frail, in earthly light, forsooth:
See, invisible it lies
In this palm: now veil thine eyes:
Quaff its fragrancies!

Would indeed my throat had skill
To breathe thee music, faint and still—
Music learned in dreaming deep
In those lands, from Echo's lip:
'Twould lull thy soul to sleep.

Candlestickmaker's Song

C. ARMSTRONG GIBBS

Cold the moon that gleams thine eyes Yet be-neath her
furth - er skies Rests for thee a
p
pp
loco
par - a - dise I have plucked a
mf
mf
flow'r in proof Frail in earth-ly light, for sooth

See, in-vis-i-ble it lies in this palm, Now veil thine
p
eyes quaff its fra-gran-cies
mf
Would in-deed my tongue had skill to
breathe thee mu-sic faint and still Mu sic learned in


dream - ing deep In that land from
e - - cho's lip 'Twould
p
pp
lull thy soul to sleep
8
loco
ppp

[*All sound dies away; and except for the fluttering of the flames, the scene is sunk in silence. Sallie flits softly to the edge of the woods.*]

Sallie [*whispering*].

Mr. Candlestick-maker! Mr. Candlestick-maker! Ah, he is gone.

[*For a while it would appear that the human beings in this scene are masquerading puppets deprived of life; but presently, one by one, they begin uneasily to stir and to return to their parts.*]

Miss W. [*murmuring*].

> That strain again—it had a dying fall:
> O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south

that breathes—*that breathes*—Oh, but that's just the difficulty . . .

[*She draws her hands over her eyes as if to banish dream from them.*]

What were the words? "'Twould lull thy soul to sleep." Foolish, scatterbrained children! A quick end; a quick end; there'll be a long bill to pay for this. [*She rises.*] But there, I have been old and now am young—take me home, Jeremy; conjure me back to reality before my hair comes down and I am fifteen again. Come, Josephine. Dinner at eight, Jeremy —on the duckpond. [*To Lady Minch.*] Louisa, you shall give me a lift.

[*The rest of company are now recovering their five wits. Lady Minch, however, slumbers on, and her only response to Miss Welcome's invitation is a faint and prolonged snore.*]

Mrs. B.

I fancy, m'm, she'm enjoyin' a little nap, poor dear.

The Candlestick-
maker
D.P.L.

Miss W.

Louisa! Louisa! Dream no more!

Lady M. [*drowsily*].

Say I'm not at home . . . not at home . . . *never* at home; never, never . . .

Mr. W.

Awake. Rouse thee, O, Julia. England expects!

Lady M. [*opening her eyes at last, and peering wildly about her*].

What? What? Who called? Where am I? . . . Trees! Snow! Julia! [*She struggles in vain to rise.*] Julia, I cannot move hand or foot. I am bewitched.

Sallie [*conscience-stricken*].

Oh, Lady Minch, I'm so, so sorry. Perhaps it is a little cramp. I *hope* you are not in pain

Lady M.

Painless cramp, child! You'll be talking of happy dispatch next. Demented! Ah, ah . . . I can't!

Mrs. H. [*to Mrs. Budge*].

Seem'ly, the cold's nipped her in the jints.

Mr. W. [*solemnly*].

Alas, alas, Louisa; there is but one remedy known to science for frostbite—the vigorous application of frozen snow to the affected member. Now which is it—the right or the left? It must be immediate, Louisa, or the limb drops off.

Lady M.

Heartless, heartless creature. Julia, save me!

Mr. W.

Then there's nothing for it but the sledge. *Allons, Cameradoes!*

Lady M.

Jeremy! Julia! Never.

Mr. W.

Josephine, blindfold the footman's eyes. Tony, tie their nosebags over the horses' heads. Ye stars, distract your beams. Now, then: ho, heave ho, and all together!

Miss W.

Jeremy, Jeremy—incorrigible man! [*Mr. Welcome lifts the old lady, faintly protesting, and deposits her on the sledge. Her bonnet falls off in the transmigration.*]

Mr. W.

Emily; bring the regalia.

[*Quilts, rugs, hot-water bottles are swathed and adjusted about the recumbent figure.*]

Miss W. [*to Mrs. Honeyman, protesting*].

No, Mrs. Honeyman, I will take no refusal. Tea at five. Mormon or Last Trumpeter you may be, but come you must. [*To Sallie.*] Our last furious hour, my dear child: but I have enjoyed every minute of it.

Mr. W. [*marshalling the cavalcade*].

Now, Mrs. Budge. This way, Mrs. Honeyman. Fairy godmothers, please. An arm for each of you. If fall we do, we fall together. All ready there in the rear? Then, *allons!*

[*To the discordant strains of the Marseillaise the procession moves off, Frances and Josephine brandishing the lanterns before Mr. Welcome with a fairy godmother on*

D.P.L.
-droning their enticements-

each urbane arm, Tony leading the Budge bobtail, followed by Emily ceremoniously bearing the "regalia" on a cushion; Sallie and Miss Welcome, interlinked, like two schoolgirls, bring up the rear.

As the strains of the human anthem faint into the distance, from the woods reappear three fairies, in mortal disguise. Their sharp chins out-thrust, they drone as they advance with a wasp-like intensity, and stand mopping and mowing softly in the porch of the snow-hut.

Presently Ann puts out her touzled sleepy head. She rubs her eyes, as if to banish her dreams.]

Ann.

You buzzes like bees, you does. Ann likes you. All, all alone, now. Naughty Ann! [*She creeps out on her knees in the snow, one arm hugging Sarah to her bosom. The fairies retreat before her, droning their enticements.*] Ann, please run away with Fairies into the woods. [*To her doll.*] Would Sarah like that?—go down snowy bunny-hole with Mummie, like Alice? . . . Poor, poor Sallie. Never, never know where Nann gone—far, far away. [*She stands up, her strange small self, and looks longingly towards the dark silent house.*] Ann say good-bye, if you please, to dear, dear Sallie? Give dear Sallie a hug?

[*The three Fairies lure her on, catch at her fingers, touch her hair as if it were some fabulous metal, redouble their allurements. Voices near and far, in a growing burden of music, echo their monotonous incantations, and half willingly, half reluctantly, the child is drawn out of the firelight and vanishes into the woods. With a wild dying gust of sound the music ceases, and all falls utterly still. At an upper window of the house the light of a candle flickers, droops, shines out. Frances's voice is heard in the distance.*]

Frances.

Not here, Sallie.

Emily [*shrilly and also from a distance*].

She ain't been in the kitchen, miss.

[*Sallie appears.*]

Sallie.

Sallie coming, Mummikins. Naughty, wicked Sallie coming. Don't be frightened, my precious. Oh, she'll die; she'll die. What shall I do? [*Kneeling down at the mouth of the snow-house, she murmurs tenderly and pleadingly.*] Come, Mummikins; wake up, Sallie's own, own sweetheart! [*Tony enters with a stable lantern.*] I can't see, I can't *see*. A light, Tony, quick, a light. Oh Tony, Tony, she's not there! [*She rises as if dazed, her hands over her eyes.*] I can't think: I can't *think*.

[*Frances enters.*]

Tony [*calling from out of the snow-house*].

Not here, Sallie: nothing here.

Sallie.

Gone, France. Gone! . . . O, how could you be so cruelly, *cruelly* careless?

Frances.

I, Sallie! *My* fault! . . . There, there, my dear, my dear! Don't cry, Sallie; please don't cry. She can't be far away. [*She runs a little way into the woods, and calls.*] Nannikin! Nann-O! Nann-O! Now, then, Tony, both together. Nann-O! Nann-O!

[*A wailing of fairy voices faints sighingly into the distance. Snow begins to fall. The three stare at each other aghast.*]

Sallie [*quietly controlling herself*].

I'm sorry, France, for what I said. All my blame; only mine.

Frances [*sturdily*].

No, Sallie. It *was* my fault. I was fooling while you were doing all the work.

Sallie.

Think now; think—quite quietly. They have decoyed her away. What shall we *do?*

[*Emily comes flying in, scared out of her wits.*]

Emily.

O, miss, the voice, the voice!

Sallie.

Hush, child; think what you are saying; what voice?

Emily.

O, miss, as I was looking into the bedroom, in the moon, lone and cold. O, miss, the voice!

Sallie.

There, there, my dear. Control yourself. Tell me, what voice? Where?

Emily.

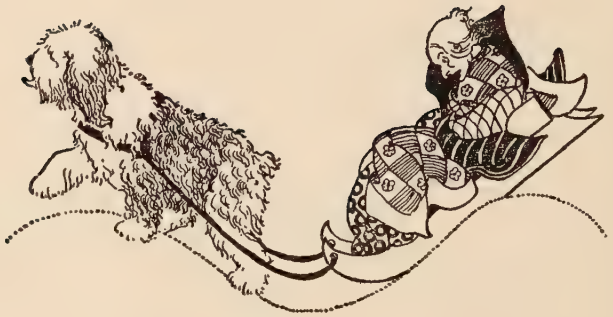
O, miss, still and quiet like the wind in the chimbley—"Safe —safe—safe." Like that, miss, those very words.

Sallie [*kissing her*].

There, Emily: never mind now. Go straight back into the kitchen. Make a great roaring fire. Put on all the kettles. Hang blankets to heat. Lights in all the windows; lights

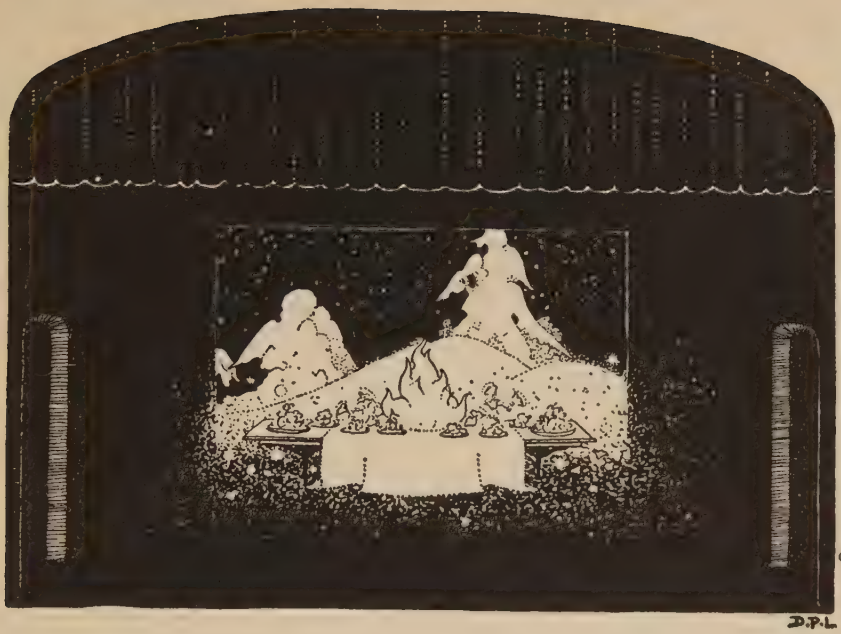
everywhere, France. Come, Tony, bring the lantern. We can follow her footsteps. [*She turns away, and sees the Candlestick-maker, who is standing in shadow at the verge of the woods.*] Oh, Mr. Candlestick-maker; help me. Ann is gone!

CURTAIN



Act Five

The Ending



Act Five: The Ending

Aunt Susan and the Fairy Queen

Time: Christmas Eve. Scene: The parlour at Crossings, lit fitfully by a log-fire and a few tall wax candles. The walls are festooned with bunches and garlands of holly, ivy, box and mistletoe. A table stands in the left corner at the back of the room. On this are arranged a few old china dishes of fruit and cakes. The tiny goblets and the Fairy Wine gleam and sparkle on the spinet.

[*The Candlestick-maker, masked and with a wreath of ivy entwined about his hat, is seated on a stool before the fire tuning his fiddle. Tony squats on a stool beside him, glum and motionless, staring into the flames.*

Emily enters from the right carrying a dish of oranges and a lighted taper in a long taper-holder. She is dressed

country-fashion for a party, her finery protected beneath an apron many sizes too large for her. Her colourless hair is tied in two lean plaits with big bows of black ribbon. She solemnly arranges the oranges, leaning her head now this side, now that, to admire the effect.]

Emily.

Ah, Mr. Candlestick-maker, you may twangle your tunesome strings, but this be a sad and doleful Christmas Eve for a merry-making. *Poor* little Miss Ann! 'Tis findings keepings with they Pisky-folk, I'm afeared—like the little Lady Jane Medlar which was whisht and witched away by the fairies hunnerds and hunnerds of years agone. Mother have told me the tale many a time. [*She stands and looks at him.*] She were kind of comical in the head, 'tis said, when she did come back; and was buried an old 'ooman in Crossings churchyard.

C.-M. [*tunes on*].

Never fear, pretty maid. The child will come back: all in good time.

Emily.

Ah, "good time." To-morrow-come-Never, Mr. Candlestick-maker. The young leddies are wonnerful cast down. Miss Sallie—she'm pale and wan as a shadder by moonlight; and Mr. Tony, there, he eats no more than would keep a sparrow in feather. But a party's a party, Mr. Candlestick-maker, and there's no un-askin' them that's asked. And—Mr. Candlestick-maker!

C.-M.

Yes, my dear?

Emily.

That young leddy's kind regards for 'ee passes the love o' woman, they do. If she didn't take to herself your comfort about the little lost lamb, she'd droop away into her tomb. I hope if so be you ain't bein' kind to kill.

C.-M.

Kind to make alive, Emily.

Emily.

They be dressed for the party in gowns so plain as a corpse's smock. *My* hair-ribbons are black, you will be noticing.

[*Enter Frances in her Bayswater frock, "right-side-out"; Josephine, resembling, in her white muslin frock, a moss rose; and Pollie Budge, the butcher's small daughter. Pollie Budge is a shy, fat, apple-cheeked child who gapes round-eyed at the candles and is mothered patronisingly by Emily.*]

Frances [*to Josephine*].

We went calling and calling for miles through the woods—*dismally* dark and cold, Josephine. The further we went, the thicker fell the snow—not a sound else. We shouldn't be having our party at all, my dear, if Mr. Candlestick-maker wasn't sure Nann would come back.

Josephine.

It's like a story out of Grimm. [*To the Candlestick-maker.*] You really mean, Mr. Candlestick-maker, that all they wanted was a lock of her hair.

C.-M.

Aye, for the Queen's Crowning. That sleek gold hue it must be, and given willingly. There's heath-dancing and feasting all England over to-night, and a full moon like glass. They

are friendly enough to children, the Little People; in their own inhuman fashion, haunting between time and space, wisping and gathering with the moon, and a prey to music. Let well alone. . . .

Frances.

Come, Josephine, it's half-past seven already, and nobody here but you. Let them stay away, then. Who cares—so long as you are you?

Josephine [*laughing*].

I don't think Arabella Minch will come. When Aunt Julie called at the Hall this afternoon, Lady Minch was sitting with her feet in mustard and water, and her wig off. Uncle Jeremy says she would be a charming old thing if only we could see her as she sees herself. *Some* of them won't come, Frances, because you didn't put your address on the invitations. At least, there was none on mine.

Frances.

Josephine! But there, it's the same old lesson. If Aunt Bayswater had had her way, I should never have known how stupid I am. Being *called* stupid only makes you stubborn and conceited. [*She goes to the windows and peeps between the curtains.*] It's useless to wait and worry. Whatever happens, Pollie and Emily must have a happy evening. Now, Emily, what game shall it be? Off with your apron. *I* see you under the mistletoe, Pollie. Come, Tony, *you* weren't to blame.

[*Tony stoops closer over the fire. The Candlestick-maker strikes up the air of "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush," the children form a ring, and begin dolefully to sing and circle. There is no spirit in them. Suddenly the prolonged pealing of a bell resounds*

fantastically disguised as earth-children

through the house. Quiet falls, broken only by the infinitesimal scraping of the Candlestick-maker. The children pause, startled, and eye one another.

Sallie hastily enters, wan and distrait, in her Bayswater clothes. She is followed by two Fairies cloaked to the heels in broad dazzle-work of rich, dark colours, and fantastically disguised as earth-children. Their faces are milk-white, their clear cheeks carmine, their lips vermilion, their eyebrows arched high above their eyes. They have the menacing shyness of fierce wild things astray in dangerous company.]

Sallie [*to Frances*].

It's cold and lonely out there, France; and the moon a blaze of mockery. They are queer children. I asked their names; they only muttered; and edged and scrambled into the house like bats. Who can they be?

[*The Fairies, having lifted their hands in secret salutation to the Candlestick-maker, begin, with immobile faces and strange, rhythmical gestures, to sidle and jape and angle with the children. Again and again the far-away house-bell clangs into the room; and Fairies, in similar disguise, flock in one after another. The music loudens—it is as if a tempest of wind encircled the house—the ring widens, the beat of feet and strings grows ever more furious, until a wild throng of unbidden guests are in the dusky room, like bees. The children stand mute, lost between alarm and astonishment at the whirling and droning and clamour of strings, bells and drumming, which shakes to the foundations the emptiness of the old and lonely house. Suddenly, with a shrill ululation, the ring of Fairies splits into two equal crescents. They abase themselves in the dust. In this dead hush the Queen enters, clustered-in by her bodyguard. Her*

face is fierce, crystalline, and not of a human beauty, and her head is crowned with a crown of undiscovered gems, surmounted at its apex with a tuft of Ann's bright human hair. The children shrink back from this bedazzlement, while Sallie stands trembling and alone in her ludicrous Bayswater gown, confronting the Queen.]

Fairies [*in a clamour, like that of bells volleying*].

Ahlâ! Ahlâahlâahlâh!

The Queen [*as if in a strange tongue*].

I come to *Crossings,* Mammazella. Is a stranger a welcome guest?

Sallie.

Welcome, indeed, lady!

The Queen.

And these, Mammazella?

Sallie [*breathlessly*].

All are welcome.

[*The Fairies rise and encircle Sallie and the Queen with their dancing, gradually accelerating their paces until they break again to left and right, and once more abase themselves.*]

Fairies.

Ahlâ! Ahlâahlâ!

[*The Queen gently spreads her hands upon the air, as a bird in a tropical forest its plumes, and the heavy curtains concealing the windows of the room softly drift asunder, revealing in snowbound stillness the garden and woods. A trance of light dwells over them in which gleamings as of precious stones and minute cressets of fire come and go. Again the Fairies wheel about their*

Queen, and again prostrate themselves in obeisance. At the Queen's gesture the wall which faces the children now seems to disintegrate, to fade out of being before their eyes, disclosing a long table, laden with vast platters and pyramids of exotic cakes, fruits, flowers and gewgaws. In the midst of its splendour rises an immense flower-like fruit, flame-shaped, as if of glass, yet intransparent. An almost unendurable radiance fills the air.]

Emily [*chirping shrilly to Pollie*].

Look 'ee, Pollie Budge! Bathe those big eyne of yourn in that bright sight. [*To Frances.*] O miss, 'tis the Day of Judgment, it is.

Pollie [*in a small, high, piping voice*].

Emily! shinin'! shinin'! shinin'!

[*Suddenly overcome with wonder and delight, she bursts into tears, and hides her eyes in Emily's skirts.*]

The Queen.

Lo, now, Mammazella; the feast is prepared, the guests are ready. I come not again. One wish shall be thine for the asking—beauty incomparable, gold incomputable, a wit to make witchcraft, a tongue to breathe charms, the pursuit of thy feet, the desire of thy strange, dark, dwelling, dreaming, human eyes. Speak: it is thine.

Sallie [*bowing herself, scarcely able to utter the words*].

O, but I have only one wish—only one: my sister, just to have her back!

[*The Fairies twirl, crooning, each in her place; their shrill drone rises like that of a hive at noonday; then suddenly ceases.*

At the Queen's gesture the strange fruit seems to flake away in petals of light, discovering at last the little

figure of Ann crouched up within it, fast asleep, her doll still clutched in her arm. The Fairies in their secret places have dressed her after their own pleasure in birds' feathers, of gold, white and grey, and have painted her cheeks and lips to resemble their own. Her hair is "bobbed" and entwined with a wreath of frosty elf flowers.]

The Children [*in one unanimous acclamation of joy*].

Nann!

Emily.

Look 'ee, Pollie Budge! Her cheeks do shine like Midsummer; like full moon-tide.

[*Pollie only sinks her head further into concealment.*]

Sallie [*scarcely whispering*].

Nann! Nann!

[*She lifts the child down from the table.*]

Ann [*peering up out of her dreams*].

Sallie . . . is that you, Sallie? Ann's dreamed and dreamed and dreamed. Far, *far—dark* snow. And singing. And O Sallie, Ann's eyes did dazzle; and [*with intense secrecy*] they did cut off Ann's hair with knives of gold. [*She draws her hand over her face with a sigh.*] And please, Sallie, does you forgive me? [*Smoothing the cheek pressed close to her own.*] And Sallie—isn't it time to wind up all the clocks again?

Frances.

Quick! They are going to dance!

[*Frances, Sallie and Tony rush out in transport, and presently return in their "inside-out," and gay shawls, scarves and ribands. The children fall upon the feast. A Ballet. The garden is a-flock with Fairies. Lanterns dip and blaze in and beneath the snow-laden trees. Now*

D.P.L.
—or mounted on strange beasts—

enter—on foot, or mounted on strange beasts—from the woods to make obeisance to their Queen, Fairies that have travelled to her Crowning from all regions of the world—Arabia, Cathay, Kamchatka, Lyonnesse, the furthest Hebrides, Thule, Greenland, Java, the Sahara, Peru, and from the seas' remotest limitations.

At the height of these revellings and dancings the raucous strains of "Good Christian Men, rejoice" burst in to the accompaniment of French horn, bassoon, etc. The Waits are come to Crossings and are carolling with their lanthorns in the snow on the other side of the house.

At the word "Christian," the Fairies cry and cluster in consternation round their Queen, encircling her, tweeting with small cries like alarmed birds, as they troop and scatter into the moonlight. When the first verse of the Carol has been sung to the end, all is still and deserted: only the vacant moonlight hazes the garden. Fruit, feast, and the "will-o'-the-wisp" lights have vanished as they came.

A cock crows.

Then enter from within Mr. Budge, Mr. Honeyman and Mr. Welcome in masks and dominoes, their heads garlanded with holly, box and mistletoe respectively. Mr. Budge comes forward, and in his best official voice, reads from a paper as if it were a Royal Proclamation:—]

"Mr. Budge and Mr. Honeyman of this parish being in their right minds and of full age D.V. present their compliments to Miss Sarah Wildersham and it being a custom in the butchering and baking trade (retail) to take 50 per centipede off all orders *off* the premises and never to make no charge *whatsoever* for first-week customers beg to present their jint account of 13/0½ for future settlement funds permitting at Miss Sarah Wildersham's *leisure* with the compliments of the season. And

God bless you merry, young ladies, let NOTHING you dismay!"

The Children.

Hurrah!

[*Mr. Budge returns to his fellows, the Candlestick-maker joins them, and the four Mummers stand in a row and sing:*—]

[*All*] We be mummers, stood a-row:
[*Severally*] Holly, Box and Mistletoe,
Ivy pranked in moonshine hoar:
[*All*] We be mummers, one and four.

[*Severally*] Leaf sharp-pricked and berry red:
Rare the fragrance Box do shed:
Creep—creep from stone to stone:
Kiss, Mistletoe; and so be gone.
[*All*] So be gone.

[*All*] Wassail sing! Nowel, Nowel!
Jocund tidings we maun tell:
Christmas Feast bring merry cheer!
[*Severally*] And we wish you all
a happy, a happy, happy—happy—
[*All*] We wish you all a Happy—New—Year!

[*Between the second and third stanzas of this Mumming Song, a ring within is heard, and vigorously repeated. No one heeds it. During the last line of the last stanza, Mr. Widge's cab drives up and comes to a halt outside the French windows. Mr. Wildersham and Aunt Agatha alight from the cab and enter. A pause. Then Sallie, Frances, Tony and Ann run to their father with cries of rapture, and drag him away to the fire. The mummers remain mum. Aunt Agatha, in dead black, her countenance deleted by a thick black veil, and with*

Little Crossings' only cab for background, stands immobile.]

Mr. W. [*slowly unwrapping his scarf and taking off his gloves*].

Well, my dears; here I am: and—and [*hollowly*] here is your dear Aunt.

Children [*in chorus*].

How do you do, Aunt—Aunt—B—b—b . . . !

[*She turns her head and surveys them through her veil. A protracted pause.*]

Mr. W. [*uneasily*].

Well, children; you see your days of trial are over. . . . But we are a little—er—gay: are we not? Eh, Agatha?

Aunt A. [*lifts her veil*].

I was speculating, Charles, how long I was to be ignored. "Gay"; it is not precisely the term *I* should have chosen.

Mr. W. [*meekly*].

Nor I—*chosen,* Agatha.

[*In the silence that follows, Sallie pours out rather unsteadily two little goblets of the Fairy Wine.*]

Sallie.

Daddy dearest, you must be frozen—frozen!

[*Ann, balancing the other tiny goblet with extreme caution between finger and thumb, carries it off to Miss Wildersham.*]

Mr. W. [*screwing in his eyeglass*].

What's this, eh? [*He lifts the glass to the light and cautiously sniffs at the contents.*] Home-made, Sallie? [*He tastes it.*] H'm. [*Gently bemused.*] H'm. H'm. [*He sinks into a reverie.*]

Ann [*to Miss Wildersham; nodding her head, as if telling a prodigious secret*].

Aunt Bayswater—Ann been to Fairyland. Ann's hair chopped off! *Please* take lickle tiny sip.

All.

Please. [*Miss Wildersham angrily waves Ann aside, who thereupon carries off the little glass to the cabman.*]

Ann.

Mr. Widgery likes Fairy Wine.

Aunt A.

Charles! Enough of this buffoonery. Do you realise that your children have gone stark, staring *mad?* Look at that! Look at that! And at *that* indescribable guy! I'm ashamed of you, Sarah, and of you, Frances, and—of—*I* see you, Anthony, skulking behind your sisters.

Mr. W. [*hazily endeavouring to repress an inward exhilaration*].

Well, Agatha, things are not quite perhaps as—in fact—I *anticipated.* And yet, you know, the air is very invigorating; and an extraordinary sweet—er—smell. But ah, yes; of course —Susan's conditions. The fact is, Sallie—that is, what your dear Aunt and I wish to know is—Are you happier than when you left—er—Bayswater?

Sallie.

Happier, Father! I'm simply beside myself with happiness.

Frances.

And I!

Tony.

And I!

Ann [*looking over her shoulder as if to test the inmost truth of the phrase*].

Ann *'side* herself. [*She feels the breath of the night wind beneath her bobbed hair.*] *'Licious* cold neck!

Josephine [*blushing furiously*].

As for me, Mr. Wildersham, if you don't mind my saying so, I've never been so happy in my life.

Aunt A. [*grimly*].

Aye, Charles, I have no doubt of that. But was mere happiness Susan's *only* condition?

Mr. W. [*meekly*].

No, Agatha. I must tell you, Sallie, of a little innocent—stratagem, my dear. Your Aunt Susan thought that if you were all left high and dry—entirely alone, I mean, for a fortnight, the experience might be a rather severe test of your *Prudence.* [*He fumbles in his pockets and produces a slip of paper.*] I ventured, Agatha, to make a note of your sagacious comments on the proposal at the time. Perhaps it would be as well to read them.

Aunt A.

An admirable idea.

Mr. W.

"Mark my words, Charles, the children will simply run wild. They will do *no* lessons. They will over-eat, and over-sleep. They will masquerade in all the colours of the rainbow. Sarah will run up enormous bills with the tradespeople. Her good heart, as you call it, will welcome every beggar and footpad that whines at the door. Frances will read every tr—r—ashy novel that comes her way. Anthony will be out at all hours of the night and day. He will smoke, burn, and bur—row. They will keep open house. *Crossings* will become a byword for miles around. As for Ann, she'll be kidnapped by vagrants or wander off into the woods and be lost. That's *my* prediction." Well, my poor Sallie, what have you to say to that?

Sallie [*miserably, but bravely*].

Only, Father, that every single word of it is true.

Tony and Frances.

Absolutely.

Ann.

Ann runned away to the fairies, Ann did. Fairies chopped off Ann's hair with knives of gold. [*She is interrupted by an immense yawn.*] Daddie have lickle, *lickle* drop more fairy wine? [*She sits down in an armchair in a corner and presently falls asleep.*]

Mr. W. [*gulpingly*].

Not—er—wiser, then, Sallie?

Sallie.

Oh, but, Father—we have all made the most dreadful blunders. And we all simply long to go back to Bayswater—just so that, so that we may come to *Crossings* again! Wiser! [*With unplumbable solemnity.*] I should just about think I *am.*

Tony [*as if on the scaffold*].

And I.

Frances [*as if voluteering for the Forlorn Hope*].

And I.

Sallie.

But please, Daddy dear, mayn't we discuss that to-morrow? Mayn't we? To have you back—Oh, I am *so* happy. We never knew how much we loved you until you were gone.

[*She takes his hand in both her own and kisses it.*]

Mr. W.

My dear. Why, of course. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow . . . [*He perceives the imperturbable row of mummers.*] Dear me; I'm sure these gentlemen must be extremely

from Greenland, Cathay and Lyonesse.
D.P.L.

cold and hungry. [*The mummers bow like one man.*] They would probably enjoy something a little more animating than —er—[*glancing at the table*] oranges. Will you prepare it, Sallie? And we will follow.

[*The Children troop out after Sallie. The sound of their footsteps dies away.*]

Mr. W.

Well, Agatha?

Aunt A.

Well, Charles?

[*Mr. Budge removes his mask, throws open his cloak, and, his great red-whiskered face surmounted by a coronet of holly, comes forward.*]

Mr. B.

Sir and Madam, this being Christmas, and me makin' so bold, mum, I'm wishful to say a few words about the young leddies, sir. I be Mr. Budge—John, butcher of Little Crossings; and what I say is this ways: If livin's larnin', sir, why larnin's livin', mum. Happier—wiser: wiser—happier! 'Tis so. And I do assure 'ee, sir, that what with their grace and kindness to me and to Mrs. Budge and to my little Pollie yonder, *and* with making Crossings as gaysome *and* homely as if pore leddy, Miss Susan, was to come back into it out of her grave this very . . . Why, what I says, sir, is, *'tis so,* sir, and I can say no more. [*Overcome, he bows, wipes the sweat from his brow, and retires.*]

Mr. Honeyman [*also undisguising himself and coming forward; dismal, but smouldering*].

What Mr. Budge have said, sir, let no man put asunder. I be Mr. Honeyman—William Melchizidec, baker for these two hundred and forty-four years in Crossings village, chapel-goer regular, late Chairman of the Parish Council, and—I never—

I *never* . . . [*in a fierce whisper*] Mrs. Honeyman she says to me, she says; as we blew out the candle this very night that's gone, she says: What with their *E*conomy, Honeyman, and their pleasant ways and their purty looks and their *divine showings* to our little Embly, them children is a godsend, sir, a godsend, ma'am, to all Crossings. [*He also bows and retires.*]

Aunt A. [*faint, but pursuing*].

And what may Mr. Haberdasher have to say?

C.-M. [*masked and cloaked and with a resounding thrum on his fiddle-strings*].

I'm but a shadow, lady: here to-day and gone to-morrow—as are we all.

[*He sweeps his cloak over his shoulder, and the moonlight of the garden swallows him up.*]

Aunt A.

I don't doubt it. [*She adjusts her lorgnette.*] Possibly the gentleman in the—er—mistletoe has views?

Mr. Welcome [*unmasking*].

Ah, Miss Wildersham: you have tracked me down.

Aunt A. [*frigidly*].

I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Welcome. *Your* views would be most valuable.

Mr. Welcome.

"Views," *views,* my dear lady? It's Christmas Eve. But frankly, now, those four foolish young things have just sprouted with virtues like briars in the spring. If only my dear old friend had been alive to enjoy it all. Queen Victoria's second Jubilee was nothing to it. Happier—wiser? "Wanton kittens," Miss Wildersham, as my old friend Mrs. Honeyman assured me yesterday—"wanton kittens may make sober cats." You should have been at the Polar tea-party. Dear me, how

Lady Minch enjoyed it! The truth is, Miss Wildersham, we are none of us as young as we [*whispering*] *ought* to be.

Sallie [*in doorway*].

It's ready, Father; and please, please thank Mr. Budge. He has brought us the most beautiful turkey for a Christmas present that ever—was dead, poor thing. And oh, Mr. Honeyman, that immense plum-pudding! The basin!

Mr. H.

He wunna biled in no basin, miss. He'm a copper-boy, he be. [*Exit, followed by Mr. Budge.*]

Sallie.

And you, dear Mr. Welcome, those, those—but I shall only cry.

Aunt A.

Charles! I detest this house. I detest . . . never mind; I will say no more. But mark my——

Mr. W. [*tragically*].

Agatha! Mark no more! It's never too late to—to bend. We were young once; brother and sister, my dear. And now, here, I seem to have shaken off my old London self, like—like old clothes. Won't you—er—too?

Sallie [*impulsively*].

Oh, Aunt Agatha! do—please do. It's been *such* a lesson.

Mr. Welcome [*offering his arm*].

Allow me, Miss Wildersham. Mincepies—turkey—punch—tipsy cake—snapdragon! "God rest you *merry,* gentlemen, let nothing you dismay" . . .

Aunt A. [*stonily broods: then slowly draws down her veil*].

Thank you, Mr. Welcome: *no.* Compromise is anathema to me. My principles are my all. In fact, Charles, I prefer my

"old clothes." Children—pooh. I was brought up on *facts*. There is a late train to town: I catch that. Cabman!

Mr. Widge [*poking in his tortoise-like head*].

Only 'arf frozen, mum—the 'ansome 'arf.

Aunt A. [*calmly*].

An insolent cabman. . . . Good-bye, Sarah. I must not keep you from the tradespeople. [*She bows frigidly to Mr. Welcome, and is escorted by Mr. Wildersham to the cab, which presently rolls off to a windy shout from Mr. Widge and a loud crack of his whip. As if in echo, a sudden freshet of fantastic and menacing music wells up and subsides in the woods.*]

Mr. W. [*in the doorway; a victim of many emotions*].

It will be a—a wrench for us. But my sister is bound for a sphere that will more fully engage her remarkable abilities.

Mr. Welcome.

As are we all, I hope.

Mr. W.

She is to be married in the New Year to Dr. John Dodd Gritts, the Governor of the Blacktown Reformatory.

Mr. Welcome.

There is, my dear Wildersham, a divinity that shapes our . . . [*Their voices die away.*]

[*Sallie covers Ann up with her shawl, and kneels a moment beside her chair.*]

Sallie.

Safe now; you blessed, blessed thing. Sallie, light a fire in Mummikin's bedroom? My own dear. [*She kisses her; hesitates; then goes to the open window, and gazes out.*]

[*The Candlestick-maker appears.*]

Sallie.

More snow, Mr. Candlestick-maker! I bless and bless every feathery flake. And you were actually going without my having said one little single word of thanks for *these?* [*She touches the bunch of snowdrops pinned in her bosom.*] They are very, very early, you know. *Must* you go? Oh, Mr. Candlestick-maker, there is a mind in me that wants to listen and listen; and you have told me so much. *Must* you go?

C.-M. [*he turns his head sidelong, wrapping his cloak around him*].

Here to-day: and gone to-morrow. Besides, the folk are afoot, and it's a lonely road to Crossings Station.

Sallie.

You mean they might entice away my—Mr. Widge, Mr. Candlestick-maker?

C.-M.

Ay, the little people have no wasteful love for mortals. Not for all mortals. Man can but see the world as he sees it. Theirs is not ours.

Sallie [*wistfully*].

Mr. Candlestick-maker, could it not be gone to-night and here to-morrow? Just fancy: all these years and years we have known one another, and—and you have never even told me your name.

C.-M.

My name? Who needs a name that is a wanderer? Maybe, if I come again, you will not know me—until I am gone again. It is said the Fables are of my kin, and that my mother was a Dreamer. An ancient family. Older than Babylon: older than Tyre. It is said that a forbear of mine was wont to sit under the blossoming of the Tree of Life and to play on his bassoon in the garden of Eden. *His* name, Mammazella, was Romance.

[*He stoops, kisses her hands, and is gone. Sallie stands at the window for a while staring fixedly after him into the snow-clouded woodlands, hesitates, as if in thought to follow him, glances back at Ann, then hurriedly shuts-to the door, and resolutely bolts it. Leaving but two candles burning in the long narrow room, she runs swiftly across it, pausing in the doorway to look back.*]

Sallie [*muttering to herself*].

Not know him? Not *know* him?

[*She goes out. In the extreme quietude that follows, the Ghost silently appears, and gliding across the room, stands solemnly regarding Ann, now fast asleep in her chair. The child stirs, murmuring in her dreams.*]

Ann.

Ann coming, Ann coming. [*She raises herself a little and gazes bemusedly up into the old, phantasmal face.*] Why, I thought—I thought you was a fairy.

CURTAIN